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62nd year of publication

Evangelicals find the center**Rejecting political partisanship, more Evangelicals are embracing a broader agenda.****Jane Lampman**

A fresh wind is blowing through the American evangelical movement: New leaders are coming to the fore. The religious right shows signs of declining influence. An evangelical "center" appears to be emerging, rejecting alignment with a single political party and embracing a broader range of concerns.

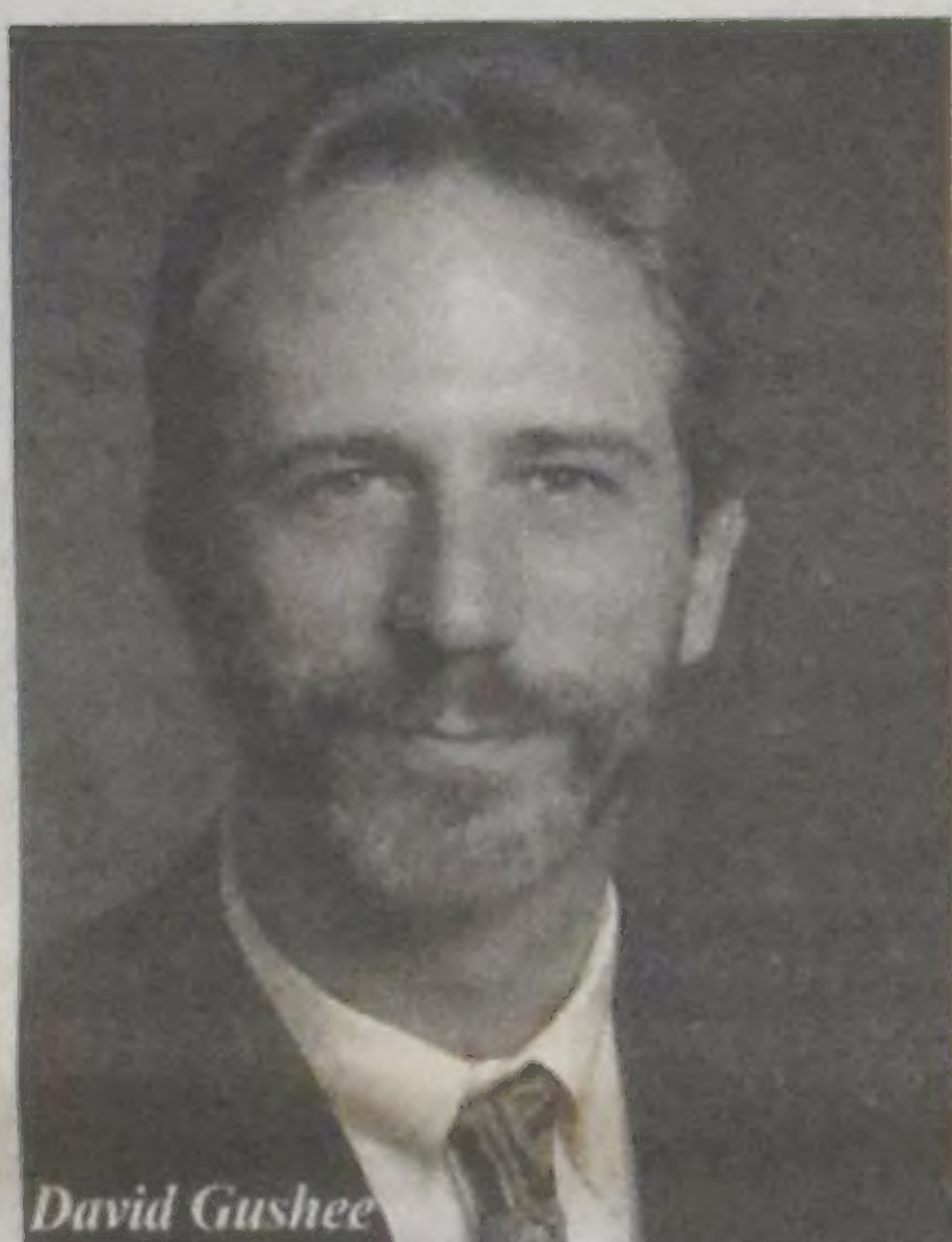
Weary of the public perception that all evangelicals back a strident Christian right, a number of faith leaders from across the spectrum are describing these changes in new books, along with their views of what constitutes a genuine, biblically based approach to politics.

In *A New Kind of Conservative*, the Rev. Joel Hunter explores why the public agenda should go far beyond the hot-button issues of abortion and gay marriage as well as how to change the tone of political engagement.

In *Red Letter Christians*, liberal pastor Tony Campolo examines the "radical vision" revealed in Jesus' words (traditionally printed in red in some Bibles)—and tackles a range of issues from war to minimum wage.

Among the most interesting of the recent crop are two books that highlight significant trends in the expanding evangelical agenda. These include the rise of an "evangelical center" and the potential for Evangelicals to collaborate with other faith groups on pressing moral issues.

About 26 percent of Americans call themselves Evangelicals, and politically they're spread across the spectrum. In *The Future of Faith in American Politics*, David Gushee provides an enlightening look at the sweep of the movement, describing key players and organizations that represent the left, right, and center,



David Gushee

and the changes under way within important evangelical institutions.

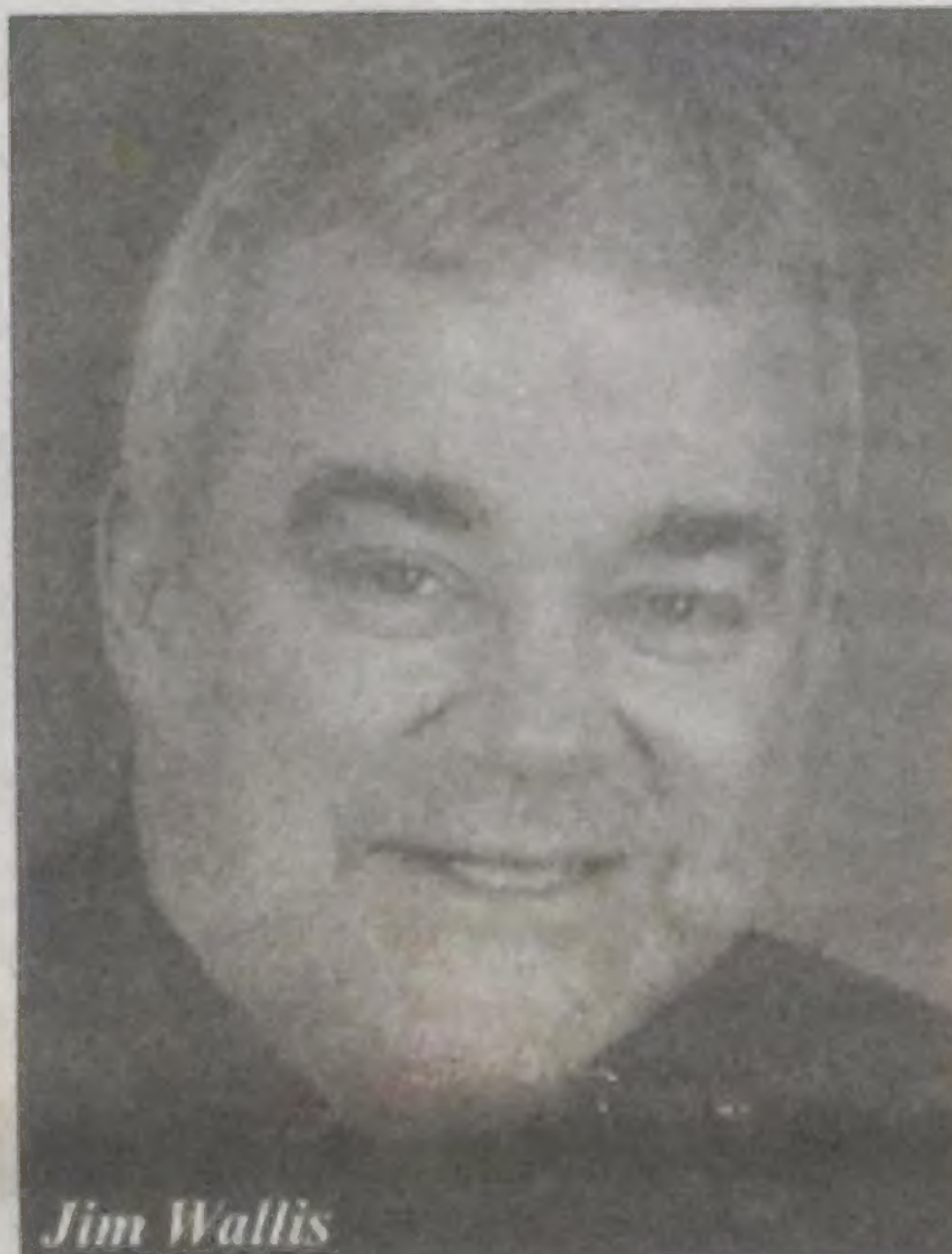
This is the first attempt to fully define an emerging center, and Gushee distinguishes clearly between the three groups.

While the center shares the right's opposition to abortion and concern about the decline of marriage, for instance, it differs in its commitment to political independence, greater sensitivity to American pluralism and the constraints of the First Amendment, and active embrace of a much broader agenda. That agenda now includes climate change, poverty, racial reconciliation, human trafficking, torture, HIV/AIDS, and peacemaking.

A professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University in Atlanta, Gushee is an insider who helped draft some of the movement's groundbreaking statements in recent years, statements which have taken it beyond issues of personal morality.

In 2004, the National Association of Evangelicals issued "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility," articulating the reasons for adding such issues as poverty and "creation care" to its agenda. In March 2007, the NAE endorsed "An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture."

Some of these commitments



Jim Wallis

outraged leaders of the right, who tried to remove key people involved from their posts, but failed to do so, perhaps a sign of shifting influence. In the forward to this book, Richard Cizik of the NAE calls the current scene "a battle for the soul of the evangelical believer in America."

Gushee also outlines core issues he believes evangelicals must grapple with in rethinking their role in public life. While Gushee is speaking here primarily to the evangelical community, his analyses offer outsiders insights into the evolving thinking within the evangelical movement.

The second book, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America*, is the latest from the Rev.

Jim Wallis. Wallis is the founder of *Sojourners*, a faith-based social justice organization. He sees the "awakening" of Evangelicals to issues of poverty and justice as the early stirrings of a new social movement, particularly among young people.

Considered by many to be part of the evangelical left, Wallis penned a previous bestseller—*God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*—that helped spur Democrats to become more faith-friendly. Since then, he's traveled the country speaking to faith communities and on college campuses.

"Two of the great hungers in our world today are the hunger for spirituality and the hunger for social justice," he says. "The connection between the two is the one the world is waiting for, especially the new generation."

In *The Great Awakening* Wallis hopes to encourage such a movement. He reviews historical "great awakenings" and the social movements they spawned: the antislavery, women's rights, child labor, and civil rights movements.

When politics is broken and can't solve problems, writes Wallis, the role of social movements becomes crucial. People of faith don't do it alone, he says, but they play a key role because faith is the source of hope and personal transformation

that is essential to spur social transformation.

Wallis believes people today are yearning for a "moral center," and he discusses what it means to seek the common good. He also outlines the specific values which he believes should be embraced to accomplish desired change.

His message comes at a time when the evangelical movement has several new leaders directly focused on fighting poverty and HIV/AIDS. (These include the Rev. Rick Warren of *Purpose-Driven Life* fame.)

Wallis says that during his travels, youths of varying beliefs—from Evangelicals to Catholics to atheists—have come to his talks eager to get involved.

To help catalyze this movement, Wallis is working with pastors in a few US cities on what he calls "justice revivals." They aim to engage youths and congregations in long-term practical commitments.

Although he's active on the political scene, Wallis advises faith leaders to stay away from partisanship: "No matter who your favorite is in the election, they won't be able to change the really big things unless and until there's a social movement pressing from the outside," he notes.

Jane Lampman is a staff writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Rev. Jim Wallis searches for old-time justice

The author and activist aims to strengthen the link between spirituality and commitment to moral issues like poverty.

Jane Lampman

Jim Wallis is known internationally as a bestselling author, preacher, faith-based activist, and sought-after commentator on religion and politics.

Yet he calls himself "a 19th-century Evangelical born in the wrong century." His heroes are the faith leaders who ignited the social movements of their day, transforming America by ending slavery and child labor. Evangelist Charles Finney, he explains enthusiastically in an interview, linked religious revivals directly to the antislavery cause by signing up new converts immediately

to the abolitionist campaign.

For the ebullient Reverend Wallis, faith isn't full-blown unless it goes beyond being a private matter to pursue the public good.

"What became of religion that believed its duty was to change society on behalf of justice?" he asks in his new bestseller, *The Great Awakening*.

See Jim Wallis on page 2

News

A first step for the global poor

Abject poverty takes a terrible toll. We can stop it. But we must start by separating fact from fiction.

Mark Lange

San Francisco — Could it be possible to eradicate abject poverty in one lifetime? Ever since it was first asked, the question has seemed an improbable wish — a salve for the heart, untenable to the mind. But today, the answer is as clear as it is imperative: Yes.

The idea that every living person can have the basics essential to human survival — and from there, begin to climb the ladder of economic development — is a prospect within reach. It does not require a master plan that solves all the world's problems. It does demand that wealthy nations change their approach in ways both subtle and significant.

It also means that the world's poorest — the last billion people who barely survive on the equivalent of less than \$1 a day — must turn from lifetimes of bleak experience and look with higher expectations toward what is possible.

Today, the "average" person on the edge of survival is a child. Within the next hour, 1,200 more of them will perish. There are no easy solutions. But there is a clear path toward progress.

What's mistaken

Let's start by unpacking a few myths that impair thinking about global poverty.

It's an intractable problem.

Not so. In 1981, 1.5 billion people survived on less than \$1 a day, according to World Bank

household surveys. By 2001, that number had dropped 27 percent, to just over 1 billion. That means well over 400 million people no longer face the lethal burden of extreme poverty. The diverging exception is sub-Saharan Africa, where rich nations must operate differently — and can.

There are too many impoverished people to help.

A bogus excuse. Historically, the world's poorest covered the globe. That's no longer the case. The mid-tier developing world in much of South and Central Asia is steadily and remarkably rising in prosperity. The last billion who suffer extreme poverty are concentrated in fewer than 60 very small sub-Saharan, Asian, and Latin American countries, which means we've never been in a better position to eradicate it.

Moral obligation is enough.

Apparently not. Alleviating suffering, the prevailing call-to-action among the G-8, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and celebrities, has not compelled adequate action on the part of developed nations. We need reasons that engage a broader political spectrum. Humanitarian, labor, and environmental goals must be joined with economic and geopolitical priorities, each in service to the other.

The boys of the last billion, fodder for African warlords and Saudi-funded extremist madrassahs, are prone to carrying chaos across borders. Post-9/11 terrorpolitik makes ending extreme poverty a security priority. The left responds to the promise of a more

compassionate world; the right, to the threat of a more violent one. We must enlist both.

If aid is good, more aid is better.

Not really. Since 2001, the Bush administration has tripled foreign assistance worldwide, and quadrupled it in Africa. And NGOs build their identities around raising and giving money. But more funding isn't the most critical issue.

While humanitarian assistance has saved millions, consider this startling conclusion from a recent study by the Center for Global Development: When aid rises to 8 percent of a recipient nation's gross domestic product, it has zero effect on economic growth. Above that, it has a negative effect.

The serious challenge is one of coordination. Chronic shortages of skilled citizens in the very worst-off nations mean that more resources simply can't be deployed effectively. Instead, donors, NGOs, and private philanthropies trip over one another, competing to give money away, rather than coordinating at ground level to get results. More isn't always better; smarter is better.

Globalization is hurting the poor.

By what measure? Agricultural reform and liberalized trade and investment have lifted nearly half a billion people out of extreme poverty in China and India, supporting their survival.

No doubt global competition has caused major upheaval, which can hit the poor especially hard. That should lead to better efforts to buffer the last billion from globalization's shocks — but we shouldn't

deprive them of its abundant benefits.

Trade invariably generates mutual gains. Unfortunately, given the win-lose quality of political brawls, many don't believe in mutual gains, assuming that one country's wealth must be explained by another's exploitation. This breeds cynicism about globalization.

For anyone on the edge of survival, the real risk isn't globalization. It's isolation. The most sustainable contribution that developing nations can bring to world markets is their labor. It produces far more widely felt economic benefits than extraction of natural resources such as oil. But with labor capacity in eastern and central Asia growing so dramatically, potential workers in the very poorest nations risk being shut out of world labor markets for another two centuries.

None of this is to suggest that globalization's negative effects should go unchecked. Trade protesters aptly call out Western hypocrisies, corruption, and exploitation. They help governments make rules to protect the weak. But developing nations that grow their economies through global trade are able to afford more mature regulatory regimes, enforcement of decent labor standards, and better environmental technology. Cutting off trade is a death sentence.

Wealthy nations must work to reduce poverty everywhere.

Why? This well-intended ethic is driven by a natural — but in this case dangerous — human tendency to focus on relative standing, independent of absolute well-being.

Imagine a Masai tribesman in the

Jim Wallis *continued from page 1*

Could it be that its time has come again? Signs grow that a shift is under way in this direction within the evangelical movement, and particularly among the young. At the same time, Wallis's last bestseller — *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* — helped nudge Democratic presidential candidates into articulating a connection among their faith, values, and policies.

On a 20-city book tour, the voluble white-haired preacher scoots from speeches in packed churches to radio and TV interviews, pressing his message that a new social movement is indeed stirring to address the moral issues of today.

To a Sunday-afternoon crowd at Trinity Church in Boston, he talks of faith's role in overcoming cynicism and bringing about societal change. "Hope is a choice made because of faith; believing in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change," he says. "The best social movements have spiritual foundations."

Wallis could be his own best example. Until recently, he felt like a man born out of time because for decades, evangelical fervor has focused predominantly — and often angrily — on issues of personal morality, such as abortion. It ignored what Wallis considers the concerns central to Jesus' teachings. At the top of his list: care for the poor.

When he was a seminary student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago in the 1960s, Wallis and his classmates searched the Bible for references to poverty. When they turned up thousands, it sparked a personal "awakening" that has guided his life ever since.

"God hates injustice," he says. He founded *Sojourners*, a social-justice ministry and magazine, and began what has become three decades of living in low-income communities in Washington, D.C. "Your perspective is shaped by what you see when you get out of bed in the morning," he says, quoting a truism from the civil rights movement.

When the religious right was at full throttle in the 1990s, Wallis started *Call to Renewal*, a network of pastors from across the United States (mainline and black Protestants, Roman Catholics, evangelicals), to work toward overcoming poverty.

"The Call to Renewal effort was very productive in making it clear the religious right didn't speak for all churches," says the Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, a nonprofit, "and also making it clear to churches they needed to speak out."

It was at a 2006 Call to Renewal conference that Sen. Barack Obama gave his major speech on faith and politics.

This country has not conquered poverty, Wallis believes, because most Americans don't

have any relationships with poor people. "Lack of relationship leads to lack of understanding, empathy, and urgency, and creates stereotypes, myths, and excuses," he says. Instead, the bureaucracy has "serviced" poverty.

But crisscrossing the country over the past few years, Wallis is exhilarated by what he sees happening in the evangelical community — and, broadly, among young people. The National Association of Evangelicals has officially stepped out to embrace a broader agenda, including poverty and environmental action.

"Jim is one of the people who's inspired Bible-believing Christians to see the connection between justice for the poor and Christian faith," Mr. Beckmann says.

And youths have been showing up at his talks eager to get involved in social justice issues, from HIV/AIDS to Darfur to poverty. They are mostly Christians, but also Jews, Muslims, and even atheists.

One Muslim youth leader who's been strongly influenced is Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago. In a *Washington Post* online column, Mr. Patel writes of seeking out Wallis and going to hear him many times in recent years. He calls himself a member of "the Jim Wallis generation," and says, "we are ready to change the world."

Some Evangelicals have criticized Wallis as a liberal who's not vocal enough on issues

like abortion. In his book, he says people are tired of right and left and hungry for "a moral center" focused on the common good and getting things done.

In an interview, Wallis says he's talked with both Democrats and "compassionate conservative" Republicans, seeking a bipartisan way to put poverty and the UN's Millennium Development Goals on the public agenda. The day his new book came out, he says delightedly, Congress passed a resolution committing to the goal of cutting poverty in half in 10 years.

"It's a nonbinding resolution, but you can build on it," he says. "Britain has made that commitment and already cut it by 7 percent."

But he isn't likely to focus his time lobbying Congress or getting involved in partisan politics. Experience tells him that nothing will change on the big issues until there's strong public pressure on politicians to make them accountable. That's where a new social movement comes in.

Wallis is clear that a "vision without a strategy is like faith without works." He has a plan for galvanizing people into action — and it looks a lot like that of his 19th-century heroes. He proposes a set of "Justice Revivals" in various US cities. In what he calls "a combination of Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr.," they'll involve a call to faith, but lead to specific actions.

See Jim Wallis on page 16

News

Why so much aid for the poor has made so little difference

Serengeti, describing himself as happier when the grass thatch on his hut is thicker than his neighbor's. In absolute terms his wealth is negligible. And by first-world standards he might consider it miserable. The primacy of relative inequality means that, especially as globalization puts sharper focus on disparities of wealth, egalitarian ideals prompt wealthy nations to devote resources to reduce relative poverty everywhere.

This seems like the fair objective, pursued in the belief that reducing disparity supports social stability. But it's wrong.

There's an enormous opportunity cost to devoting limited resources to better-off, mid-tier developing countries. Their citizens, while struggling, aren't dying by the millions every year. The last billion are. The fact that rich nations spread resources broadly and thinly may be easy to explain politically, socially, or economically – but it's much harder to justify ethically if we really believe every life is of equal value.

Today, first-world ideals of relative equality lead to diffuse aid and philanthropic efforts, effectively paid for with the lives of the poorest. The desire to support relative well-being is a critical distraction from the question of absolute human survival.

If we're serious about saving lives, rich nations should devote disproportionate financial and technical resources to the very worst-off – to build a floor for their survival, and to deliver the basis for self-sustaining growth and wealth of their own creation.

What's true

Getting past popular misperceptions that impede progress for the very worst-off, what is true about extreme poverty?

It overwhelmingly slaughters the young.

The gap between what the rich world has promised at United Nations summits, but has yet to actually deliver, means that every year four million more children won't make it to their fifth birthday.

We have the resources to eradicate it.

The world's richest 500 individuals have the same income as the poorest half-billion. The developed nations aren't close to the UN commitment to devote 0.7 percent of gross domestic product to aid. The US is at 0.2 percent, and private and philanthropic sources don't come close to narrowing that gap in the poorest countries. But this isn't simply a redistributive exercise. We know more now about the progression from subsistence agriculture to micro-enterprise and light, sustainable manufacturing exports – and how self-directed growth lifts people out of poverty.

It is a question of will – and working smarter.

For wealthy nations: it is the will to listen harder to those we would serve, to experiment, to adapt, and to work smarter. For citizens in civil society among the poorest nations: it is the will to push past disappointment, past corruption and cynicism about the legacy of colonialism, and to believe in what is possible.

Is poverty cultural or technical? Such debates shouldn't impede progress.

Mark Lange

Is poverty a problem of policy or destiny? Experts tend to pull in one of two directions. Some focus on the social fundamentals for prosperity. Others, on the technical and financial requirements for sustainable growth.

It's cultural.

In this view, policy is beside the point. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam says that "social capital" – how closely people in a community are connected – supports the basis for trust essential to commerce. Economist Gregory Clark of the University of California argues that prosperous societies grow their economies through Industrial Revolution values such as patience, hard work, innovation, and education. Some cultures support such values, some don't, and they certainly can't be imported or master-planned. Implication: Some poverty is permanent.

It's technical.

Others say the developed world has the policy tools poor countries need and the obligation to show them how to use them. While specific proposals vary, development economists such as Paul Collier, Jeffrey Sachs, and Joseph Stiglitz argue that wealthy nations know how to create the conditions for accountable governance, open markets, capital formation, low taxes, reliable institutions, and regulatory frameworks with courts to enforce them. Implication: The right combination of solutions is (almost) within reach.

Whichever side of this debate you're drawn to, it is clear that decades of effort and at least \$2 trillion spent by rich countries since 1945 to bring development "to" the world's poorest have delivered, at best, mixed results. A World Bank study by Craig Burnside and David Dollar found a positive impact in countries with good fiscal, monetary, and trade policies. Later analysis by William Easterly, and Raghuram Rajan at the International Monetary Fund, indicates zero impact from Western aid on growth in poor nations – with or without sound policies. Possibly these countries would have done worse without aid. Certainly, we can do better.

The first place to push – for both cultural and technical reinvention – is not in the poor nations' ethics or economies, but in the developed world's institutions. The West's efforts to help the last billion still resound with echoes of the Marshall Plan, a top-down approach that worked wonders after World War II in educated, formerly wealthy societies, where centralized planning and imported capital made the critical difference. This approach is ineffective now – not to mention damaging to the morale of committed people in these troubled countries.

Aid institutions too often pursue disconnected agendas. For every development success story, there's another about exporting plans and resources irrelevant to needs. Excelling at raising money, uncertain about results. Struggling to coordinate 21 US agencies and 50 operating units that deliver aid. Subsidizing (through clenched teeth) shameless kleptocracies and grotesque dictators. Funding fiascoes, such as \$5 billion spent since 1979 on Nigeria's Ajaokuta steel mill, which has yet to produce any steel.

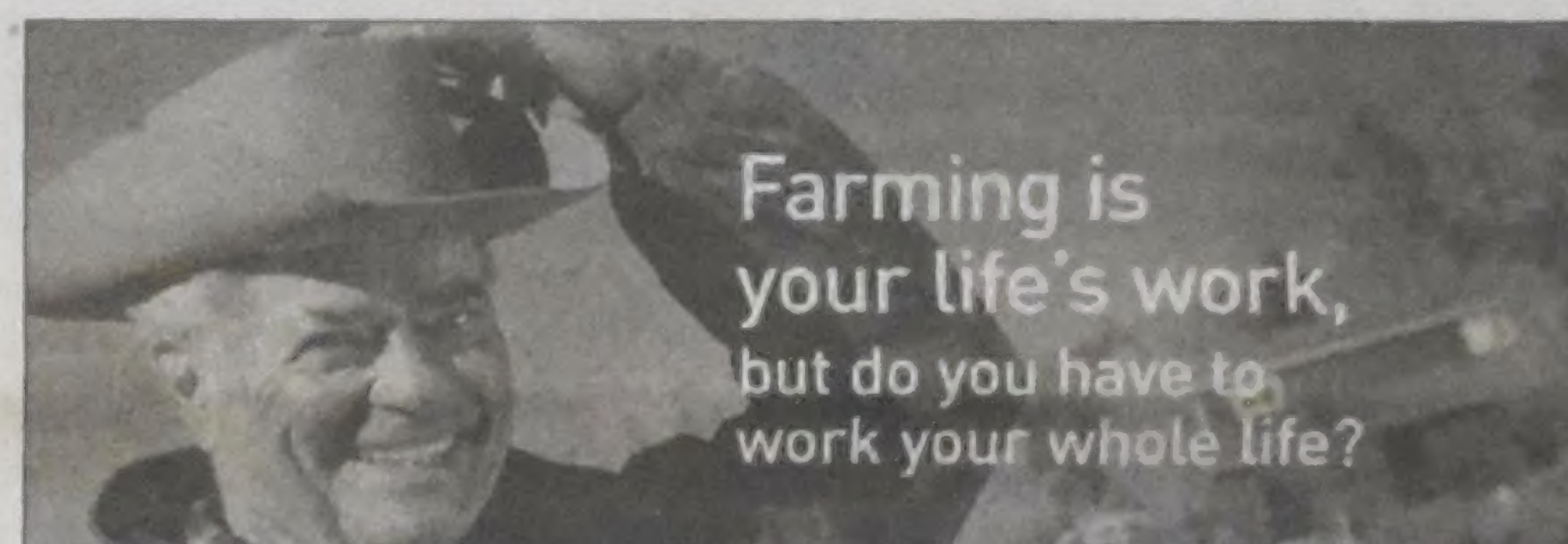
Humanitarian aid budgets aren't focused on the last billion, where the average person has an income one-fifth of those in mid-tier developing countries. Seventy percent of the last billion live in Africa, yet in 2008 only a third of all US government direct aid will go there. (This is progress: In 2001 it was only 8 percent.) Instead, Israel and Egypt together get 10 times the US direct aid that Darfur does. Russia gets as much as 20 sub-Saharan nations combined. Ireland gets 167 times what the Central African Republic does. These may be rational political transfers – but they're not life-saving

assistance.

Development agencies around the world can't find staff to serve in places such as Chad. The World Bank has offices in every middle-income country, but only one staff member in the Central African Republic. The aid posts with the most people from most rich governments are in places such as China and Brazil, which don't need the help. And when the help is there, too many of the rich world's best efforts have unintended consequences. Malawi agriculture, for instance, withered under a prohibition against subsidizing fertilizer and seed. Finally, in 2005, Malawi defied the World Bank – and after decades of dependence, became a net grain exporter.

Some aid efforts hurt even as they help. Take food aid: First-world farmers get subsidies to grow crops. Surplus food stocks are then bought (with more tax dollars) and shipped to a struggling nation, where they're distributed or converted into currency to fund (hopefully peaceful) projects. But here's the problem: Local farmers can't compete with "free" produce. No indigenous capacity ever develops. So aid reinforces a tragic cycle of dependency.

While wealthy nations underwrite this diffuse agenda, the last billion continue to pay for it with their lives, and instability spreads. To eradicate abject poverty in one lifetime, the developed world's approach must change – in some ways subtly, in others significantly.



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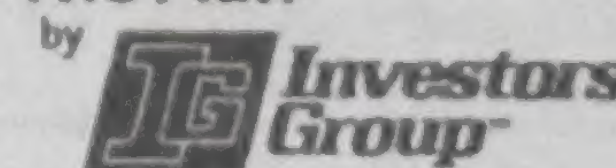
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Editorial

On the road again

Harry der Nederlanden

Walking, talking, eating. These are some of the most basic acts of our bodily existence. The oldest stories we know are about journeys and banquets. And, of course, they all involve talking. We talk to each other, exchanging stories, to clarify our sense of direction. We need to walk and talk with others to make sense of our experience and to reorder our thoughts.

After all the intense, packed, crowded events of the preceding week in the capital, Jerusalem, two unnamed disciples are walking away from the hubbub, excitement, confusion and terror. Yes, they are on their way to Emmaus. But what awaits them at Emmaus? The destination is not particularly important. They just need to get some distance between themselves and Jerusalem. Some space to work things out.

Over a matter of days they had traveled from high hopes and elation to horror and despair. All those grand visions pertaining to Israel and the nations, with their master as the long awaited leader who would restore Israel to its rightful glory and break the power of Rome – all, all dashed to pieces. Their own allegiance and identity as his followers turned into a farce. Suddenly the light that had arisen on the horizon snuffed out, and they find themselves like blind men groping their way through an unfamiliar city.

And now, on top of it all, these wild stories of an empty tomb, angels and apparitions of their crucified master. Is everyone going mad? What is happening? They want to know, but here their feet are carrying them away from the main theater of events. Their heads are spinning, their emotions whipping them this way and that, their hearts in turmoil. Their world has been turned upside-down.

They couldn't sit still. And they didn't need more input. They had to walk and to talk, to digest what they had already seen and heard. They find themselves on the way to Emmaus. But their real journey is in their talk. And there they keep going back and forth and in circles over the same ground. After walking with Jesus on this earth, they realize – through his death – that they really didn't understand their beloved master at all. Have they been duped, blind, stupid as sheep?

As they walk, they recall what they know of their master's life, what he did and what he said, and they try to harmonize it with the events of the past few days. But everything just won't come together, no matter how hard

they struggle to merge facts, experiences and words in their minds. Their minds, their whole bodies, remain jumbled and jangled. They sense at some level that they are caught up in events of great significance, perhaps even of eternal significance.

But here the leaders of Israel have conspired with those of Rome to brand their master as a criminal and blasphemer. And even the Jerusalem crowds who had hossana'd him upon his arrival had suddenly put more faith in Barabbas than in Jesus. What a shock! How disillusioning. Everything spinning to pieces like a clod of dirt rolling downhill. The center has disintegrated. So here they are walking away from the center, where everything is stained with blood and violence, even the Law itself. They walk and they talk as they had before when they followed their master's steps, but nothing could recapture that normality. Things simply won't come together. Had they ever really understood this Jesus?

Then suddenly they are joined by this stranger who poses a whole panoply of questions. And they eagerly retell the stories they've been repeating to one another. Perhaps in retelling it all to a stranger, getting some distance by seeing it through his eyes, they will see something they have missed....

The text in Luke 24:16 introduces an interesting note: it says that "they were kept from recognizing him." This can, of course, be taken to mean that their confusion and perhaps their lack of faith blinded them. What doesn't fit into our frame of reference tends to resist recognition. We don't see it for what it is.

But I think there is more going on here than that. Some other translations have, "Their eyes were 'holden' [KJV] or 'restrained' [NKJV]. The New Jerusalem Bible says, "Something prevented them from recognizing him." But the introduction of "something" as the subject seems to attribute their blindness to human factors. The other translations suggest that this is not just a self-induced blindness. It is a blindness induced by God-in-Christ.

God isn't always into revealing himself wholly. Sometimes he is the hidden God. He keeps us from seeing certain things. In Luke we hear Jesus cautioning his disciples to keep something secret for the time being. And good arguments have been made that the parables are not just revelatory but also blinding. The Kingdom of heaven does not unfold its secrets to everyone, especially not to those who do not recognize who the teller of the parables is.

But this isn't just a marginal theme in the Bible. It characterizes the entire appearance and ministry of Christ. His birth in Bethlehem is hugely inconspicuous. And who would recognize the promised Messiah as envisioned by the prophets in this humble storyteller and healer from Nazareth? But it is especially on Golgotha that the lights go out and our brains are baffled and our experience exploded. A darkness descends on the earth and our Saviour and Lord cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Not even those disciples who walked and talked with Jesus on a daily basis understood what was going on. It was all shock and horror and despair. For a while all they saw was



The Emmaus Disciples by Abraham Bloemaert, 1622

darkness and death. Yes, there were clues, as the apostles themselves related afterward in their gospels, but Jesus hardly went out of his way to spare them. We speak of Israel in the Old Testament as living by shadows, but the disciples too were partly in the dark; in fact, we may say that they were plunged into the dark. Following Jesus – the journey of faith – isn't a journey from light into light. God also leads us into darkness, to the limits of sight.

Reformed theology is well-known for its stress on the unity of Scripture. It is the same God who upholds his promises and intentions over toward us. But God himself poses an astonishing discontinuity at the very heart of time and history. The incarnation, the ministry of Christ, the cross, the resurrection and ascension – all are complete surprises. Even God's own people, raised on the great stories, the psalms and the wisdom literature didn't have their eyes opened to see what was going on in their midst.

There is throughout Scripture this interaction between blindness and insight. And it is by no means the case that the blindness is always attributable to the folly and rebellion of God's chosen people. It is a tension that remains at the center of our journey in time for as long as faith is not turned into sight. There will always be this painful discontinuity between what we are able to see on the basis of experience and reason, even if guided by faith, and what stymies, frustrates and blocks our efforts to understand. In our efforts to become whole, integrated people, we must be constantly converted, sorting out from our past what we are as new creatures in Christ, what impedes our way forward and what opens up the way for us. And we won't always be able to see the road clearly in front of us.

But we don't need to walk that road alone. We can always seek the company of the people of God as we struggle to understand and to walk the talk. And perhaps we will be surprised to find Jesus walking with us. But he has already opened the Scriptures to us and we must find the light there.

The two disciples didn't recognize the knowledgeable stranger for who he was until they stopped walking and talking and sat down to eat with him. They recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Even when we don't understand, we can stop our frenetic quest for insight and rest in the knowledge that he will feed his sheep with what they need to live.

And suddenly they are hurrying back to the body of believers in Jerusalem to add their voices to the bringers of good news.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to:
report on significant events in the Christian community
and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and
rooted in a Reformed perspective;
provide contact for the Christian community.

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publisher. Please contact circulation if you cannot afford the
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Christian Courier

5 Joanna Dr., St. Catharines ON L2N1V1

Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838

Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada,
through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our
mailing costs.

Canada

Letters

Growing leadership

The article by Peter Schuurman on the "leadership struggle" in the Christian Reformed Church (*Christian Courier* of March 3, 2008) calls for a reaction. In it Schuurman reacts to or comments on a speech by Christian Reformed church planter Darryl Bierman to a Christian Reformed Home Missions Conference held recently.

Reading the article makes me wonder: What do we mean when we talk about leadership and what is really at the bottom of a "leadership struggle" in the Christian Reformed Church (from now on referred to as CRC). If it is "the number one struggle in the CRC" we should be aware of it and pay attention to it.

It most certainly is not a new problem. It has been brewing for many years. Ever since (long ago!) the chairman of the synodical finance committee opened the "new" wing of the denominational building in Grand Rapids with the words: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the corporate headquarters of the CRC". Although he probably did not realize it and perhaps never intended it, with those words he openly questioned the principles of leadership in the church as they are defined by the Church Order of the CRC. Let me explain.

The Church Order of the CRC does not speak about leadership. But it does speak about the spiritual authority which governs the church. According to the Church Order this authority rests with the elders of the church. Not with the ministers. In this respect the minister is an elder and a member of the "consistory", subject to the spiritual oversight and discipline of the elders. So that every minister in the CRC must have his ministerial credentials in a local church. No matter what kind of ministry he is engaged in and no matter where. Each and every minister is under the supervision of the elders of a local church.

This refers to the elders as a body. Not as individuals. An individual elder does not have authority in the church. The consistory is a deliberative body. Only as they work together, pray together, discuss together and come to decisions together do the elders exercise the authority given to them.

The elders of a local church send delegates to the Classis, the regional body in which local churches work together. Here it is the same: it is a deliberative body in which delegates from local churches, pray together, work together and come to conclusions together.

Finally the same can and must be said about the general Synod of the CRC. All the classes of the denomination delegate members to this annual meeting, where all matters that could not be dealt with in the "minor assemblies" and matters of common concern are dealt with. Decision making in the CRC is arrived at from the bottom up. It starts with the local consistories (councils) and ends at the synod.

It should also be noted that there is no difference between important, very important and less important members of these assemblies. Each delegate has a vote and decisions are made by majority vote. In the same way

there is no distinction in the level of authority between the assemblies. Actually, when you take a look at the agendas of these assemblies, you will find that the most extensive and comprehensive agenda is that of the local council. The other (major) assemblies will (at least they are supposed to) only deal with matters that could not be finished in the local council or matters of common concern. And as long we are at the subject of importance, there is no difference in rank between the ministers of the church. All ministers who have been duly ordained in a local church are equal in rank and standing. Whether they serve as the pastor of a small group way out in the sticks, or are president of the denominational seminary, or they are executive secretary of the whole denomination. The Church Order makes it very clear that no minister shall "lord it" over another minister or an elder.

Now if you are looking for effective and decisive leadership this is clearly an impossible concept. Just imagine that in a business corporation decisions would only be made by the full board, acting as a body, receiving (majority and minority) advice from committees that have (sometimes at great length) studied and discussed the issues to be dealt with. It would not work. But then the church is not a corporation. It is the family of God, the body of Christ, governed and led by the Holy Spirit of God.

One of the consequences of this is that we have to live with the fact that "ecclesiastical mills grind slowly". Believe me: they do grind slowly! Irritatingly so sometimes. It takes meetings and more meetings to get everybody on board and in line for a certain idea. Many ministers have been frustrated in their enthusiasm to implement the most wonderful ideas by the slow and frustrating lack of response on the part of the elders. You may hear them say in their unguarded moments: "We should have bishops, who can make decisions!" However over the centuries the church has found the concept of government of the church by the elders of the church the best and most biblical way of handling the affairs of the body of Christ.

Even if now these ideas, which we were convinced were founded on Scripture, are being undermined and questioned by a new kind of leadership. Or by a corporate concept of the church. By which decisions are made from the top down. It has been bothering me for quite sometime already that these things are not openly discussed. But they are happening and causing friction, if not divisions in a good number of churches. An unusual number of ministers have left the ministry, or have been deposed, because of conflict situations. It makes one wonder what is happening with our church? And what is happening with our Church Order?

Under the initiative and guidance of the Home Mission Board of the CRC a new understanding of the task of ministers and elders, if not the very calling of the local church, is being questioned. I have found it

increasingly disturbing that this Board has consistently turned, not to our denominational seminary, but to non-Christian Reformed sources to train its workers. Home Missionaries were sent to Robert Schuler at the Crystal Cathedral, to Bill Hybels at Willow Creek (who according to *Christianity Today* is now rethinking his whole approach!) and others to learn how to become "effective" ministers.

Over the years distinctions have been introduced between missionary (or "missional") ministries and maintenance ministries. Changes have been introduced to the structure and functioning of local councils. All for the purpose of making the councils more effective in their decision making. We now have administrative elders, pastoral elders and whatever other kind of elders may be invented. To be sure the Church Order does not know such a distinction. This has made it necessary to write different forms for the ordination and installation of elders in the church, because the present available forms do not fit the actual situation. Or this has led councils to not use any forms of installation at all.

This is the era of church planting and church growth. Also of a growing ethnic diversity in our denomination. It is amazing and exciting to hear the stories of how quickly new churches have come into being and of how fast they have grown. The Lord is using the CRC in wonderful ways to bring in people who had never known him and served him before. At the same time Christian Reformed people have been asked not to join these new church plants, particularly if they speak the English language with a pronounced Dutch accent. Only specially selected members are allowed to join. Because the label "Christian Reformed" and the Dutch accent would create a barrier for people to come. Even though at the same time Chinese, Korean, Spanish, African accents are warmly welcomed and CRC financial assistance and contributions are gladly received of course.

All this is understandable. If you are a church planter, stationed somewhere on a

"mission field" and charged with the responsibility of establishing a church, you are on your own. You have to take initiatives, make visits, try to make friends, start bible studies, or whatever, and so slowly come to the point of convening a first church service. There is no council of elders who can make decisions for you. Only after considerable time may you arrive at the point where elders and deacons can be elected and installed. And even then your role as the church planter, the person who has been running this enterprise from the start, will be different from that of a local pastor, because the elders must be guided and helped into their position of authority. How do you then finally arrive at the point where you become an "ordinary" church pastor? This combination of leadership from the bottom up and leadership from the top down cannot but create tensions, misunderstanding, conflict and struggles about leadership.

I well remember the time that we tried our utmost to adjust our ministerial practice to the Church Order. An appeal to the Church Order would finally decide the issue. As a matter of fact once upon a time not adhering to the Church Order was a censurable offense. Office bearers and churches have been censured because of their refusal to obey the Church Order.

The Church Order is our agreement of cooperation between brothers and sisters in Christ. Adhering to the Order of the churches is what makes us Christian Reformed. The Church Order is not a law book of restricting regulations, but it is a covenant between churches, the basis of our cooperation and mutual trust. Because of our submission to the Church Order we may trust each other to walk the same line and pursue the same goals. When the Church Order is ignored this trust is gone.

It is of urgent importance that the Synod face this lack of trust between churches and clarify the situation.

Martin D. Geleynse

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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Subscriptions:	Canada (G.S.T. Incl.)	USA	Overseas
one yr. (25 issues)	\$44.00	\$44.00 US	\$85.00
two yrs. (50 issues)	\$85.00	\$85.00 US	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site www.christiancourier.ca for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published biweekly on Mondays.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838, or fax: 905-682-8313

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PRINTED IN CANADA



Perspective



Riding the rails

Didy Prinzen

Late last summer my husband and I made a train trip to the Maritimes to visit my sister and brother-in-law. The latter is getting quite elderly and struggling with some disabilities. We were anxious to see them again. They had visited us numerous times when our mother was still alive, which we really appreciated. Now it was our turn.

We decided to travel by train. We found out that with the price of gas, the wear and tear on the car (my husband's view), cost of a motel, it is more economical to travel by

train than by car. It is certainly safer. For seniors, who have lots of time on their hands, it is also more relaxing.

That does not mean that you cannot get a surprise sometimes when using the railway. Many years ago, when I had traveled alone to my sister, I had to take the bus back because of a railroad strike and we were stranded on a lonely highway in Quebec in the middle of the night, due to a flat tire. I still remember though, how brilliant the stars were above us. Quite an adventure!

Nothing that eventful happened on this journey. Considering our advanced age, that was of course a good thing. But I have enough of a child in me yet that I find riding on a train and viewing the countryside from a fast (and sometimes not so fast) moving train, a rare pleasure. It was going to be a welcome change from our every-day life in the country!

On the first stretch of our trip that took us from Toronto to Montreal we viewed seemingly endless fields of corn, interspersed with soya beans. Here and there in between we saw herds of cattle grazing in fields that looked as if there was not a blade of green grass to be had. We remarked that our lawn at home that we had thought was dry didn't look bad in comparison. The four rabbits that had been grazing on it all summer long seemed to be having a much better time.

We arrived at the grand central train station in Montreal at around suppertime. To our surprise we found out that there was a special service for seniors – a place to sit while waiting for the next train, get help with luggage or simply ask any question one might have. We had a waiting time of an hour and a half before continuing on the bigger leg of our trip – sixteen more hours. We would arrive in Moncton at noon the next day. However, we considered ourselves fortunate when we met a lady traveling to Cape Breton who would not arrive 'til 9 o'clock the evening. What a vast country Canada is and this was only a small corner of it.

I had very much looked forward to traveling through the province of Quebec but knew that it would take place in the dark of night. Nevertheless, while other passengers pulled down their shades and settled with the cushions and blankets that the train attendant had handed out, I found myself most of the night peering out the window to catch at least some of the rugged beauty of that province. Often all there was to see was the highway that for parts of the journey ran alongside the train tracks, the headlights of the cars barely keeping up with the speeding train. Sometimes I saw the tracks swing away from the highway and I would notice small towns with mainly white, wooden houses and always a church. Rarely did the train stop at their small stations. The houses were dark, the inhabitants likely asleep and so used to hearing the train and its whistle that it did not even disturb them.

Vaguely I saw us at times speeding by enormous rock formations and wished there were a full moon. I also heard the different sounds that the train made when crossing a bridge and there were many of those. I couldn't help but admire the skills of those who had built the bridges, especially the huge structures of the ones crossing the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Just when I began to doze off once in a while I saw my fellow travelers come back to life. Shades in front of windows were being pushed up – an elderly man who had been sitting across from us since we had left and who appeared to have been sleeping all night, crawled out from under his blanket, pulled on his shoes and headed for the bathroom. Through an opening between the seats in front of us I saw a young woman lean over, ruffling her partner's hair and planting a kiss on his cheek.

See *Riding the rails* on page 19

Joy that hides pain

I am thankful for Lent. It allows me to express the shadowed aspects of my Christian journey that otherwise might not be permitted in a church. Put differently, sometimes the up-beat joyful mood that some feel must necessarily dominate the church seems disconnected from the broken reality we live.

Most have heard the term "health and wealth" gospel or "prosperity gospel." It comes with a television smile and the promise that you will never taste sorrow or pain because now you are among God's people and God takes care of his own. Salvation is not only justification before God, it comes with some extra privileges, like health, wealth, and happiness.

If being human is a combination of dirt and the life-giving breathe of God, these folk have forgotten about the dirt. They have spiritualized the Christian life to the point where it has no connection to reality. They have risen up to heavenly heights and no longer touch the earth. They have extricated a huge chunk of the Psalms from the Psalter (the lament Psalms) and taken the cross out of Christianity.

Raining on the inside

Some Christians have even been told not to cry. My wife had an 80 year-old woman come to her clinic, deeply distressed. She confessed that she could not cry. She said she remembers as a young girl when her mother died how she was stopped by the local policeman who told her, "Don't cry now, your mother would not approve."

Then whenever she cried after that her father would say, "Come now, pull yourself together." As if she was acting shamefully.

Now, at age 80, she can no longer cry. Yet she feels that she needs to cry.

Joy must not deny reality. Joy that pushes reality away is not joy but an opiate, an escape, a distraction.

Professor Calvin Seerveld says in his book *On Being Human* that joy for the Christian "is not a disembodied, unhistorical relief that happily distracts one from reality" but it is rather a gut-level experience that God knows what God is doing now. Joy, he says, is an anticipation of rescue that gives you a warm strength while you do what is unpopular in your university, work or marketplace. It will not, however, obliterate your tear ducts.

Laughing on the outside

Joy and humor are not only at times a distraction from pain, but also a mask for pain.

I recently finished the biography of famous Canadian comedian John Candy entitled *Laughing on the Outside: The Life of John Candy* (by Martin Knelman, Viking,

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



1996.) It tells the story of a very large Canadian comic who was always making people laugh but who on the inside was torn up by a hollow pain that led him to over-eat and become addicted to drugs and alcohol.

"He was a genial giant" says the author, a man who "telegraphed softness" and sweetness with mass appeal that put him in over 40 movies. He had this affectionate quality to him that came out so well in his character Del Griffiths, a shower curtain ring salesman in the movie *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*. At one point in the movie he is being berated by Neal Page, the Steve Martin character and he retorts, "Hey, I'm the real article. What you see is what you get." That's what Candy's fans all thought of him.

All joking aside

While all laughter on the outside on and off the set, Candy had his share of demons. He was often anxious to the point of paranoia and panic attacks, suffered from anger problems where he would cut himself off from friends (he would put them on what he called "John's Gallows" and never speak to them) and he was plagued by an acquisitiveness driven by a desire to be someone other than himself – namely the owner of the Los Angeles Kings, Bruce McNall. Candy wanted to be liked. He wanted the applause of millions.

"I think I may have become an actor in order to hide from myself," said Candy once. "You can escape into character. You can get lost and take up another life."

Laughing only on the outside leaves us hollow on the inside. Candy ate, worked, drank, and joked himself to death at the age of 43. At 300 pounds, he died in his sleep of a massive heart attack while working on the movie *Wagons East* in Mexico.

The biographer says at one point: "born with a name that perfectly encapsulated his quality of high-calorie sweetness, John Candy was also a walking illustration of the familiar thesis that great comedy is almost always created by driven, tormented people who hope the jokes can relieve or at least mask their pain."

I led a weekend retreat recently on humor and faith entitled "Jogging on the Inside: Laughter as a Christian Exercise." I thought it was an important topic to explore as we don't celebrate the gift of laughter enough. Perhaps its related to our difficulty in acknowledging and voicing our pain.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Stewardship

Self-care helps us serve God better

Lisa M. Petsche

At the beginning of Lent I read an article about the adverse effects on our spirituality of the achievement- and consumer-oriented North American lifestyle, and how to counteract them.

It suggested we start our Lenten journey by focusing on our self-care practices (or lack of them).

Having been raised to regard Lent as a time of shifting attention away from oneself and focusing more on serving God, I found this idea strange at first.

But the more I began to think about it, the more it made sense. How can we be capable, let alone joyful, servants of the Lord if we are stressed out? How much of ourselves can we give if we are running on empty?

Many parents of my generation find themselves overscheduled and overcommitted, between caring for kids (and perhaps aging parents) and chauffeuring them to activities, performing paid work, volunteering and keeping the household running smoothly. There never seems to be enough time in the day to accomplish everything on their to-do lists.

When life is out of balance, attention to our health and time with family and friends typically are sacrificed. We may feel impatient, irritable and ineffective. We may also experience physical symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, headaches and muscle tension.

While we may be able to operate under such conditions for a surprising length of time, eventually it catches up with us in the form of physical or mental illness.

Our hectic pace may also leave little or no time for praying and reading the Bible and other spiritual resources, let alone attending a retreat. This lack of spiritual sustenance leads to feelings of emptiness, restlessness, anxiety and doubt.

Various personal traits contribute to self-neglect, including disorganization, perfectionism, workaholicism and the inability to say no to requests for help. So, too, does overuse of technology such as television, video game systems and the Internet. All too easily it can become an addiction, keeping us preoccupied, isolated and up late at night.

Certain belief systems can also be harmful to our health – for example, believing we can and should have it all and do it all and believing we must be completely self-sufficient.

One of the biggest mistakes we can make – a common one among caregivers – is equating self-care with selfishness.

Selfishness, the root of all sin, involves being “concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself” (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

Self-care, on the other hand, entails looking after ourselves in order to be healthy and consequently function at our best. It's comparable to keeping our car fuelled and maintained so we can get where we need to go.

Our mandate for self-care can be found in the Bible, where we're told that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we must therefore honour God with them (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20).

Caring for our physical selves begins with the basics: eating nutritious food, getting adequate sleep and keeping physically active. The latter might involve regular visits to the gym or it could be a family affair, taking the form of neighbourhood walks, outings to the skating rink, cycling trips and hikes, for example.

* Learning and practising stress management techniques such as deep breathing and mental imagery also helps to maintain our health.

For our mental and emotional well-being, it's important, too, to make time for relationships and for leisure activity that brings enjoyment, such as engaging in a hobby.

Spiritual self-care is also a must, because “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the

Day 3 – Land

Third in the series “Seven reflections based on the days of creation”

On the third day of creation, God gathered the water and formed seas and oceans, separating the land from the water. And then he ordered that all kinds of vegetation appear, especially vegetation that bore seeds and fruit. God created and declared that it was good! It provided the basis for animal life that followed.

Our lives and all the animals depend on the productivity of soil, water and light for our existence. Our land is precious, however, you wouldn't think so considering the way we treat it! Some of the most productive farmland in Canada has been paved over as our cities, highways and industries continue to sprawl. Even the land that is in production is often abused – mined of its nutrients and contaminated with chemicals – as modern mechanized mono-cultural cropping prevails. Forests continue to be chopped down (consider the Amazon Basin) and land is being cleared in very sensitive areas in the world with devastating impact on wildlife habitats. Each year the deserts in Africa take over more of the marginal grazing land. Our record in Canada is one of land abuse too, mining to extract resources so we can make a profit now with less thought about stewardship.

When God entrusted mankind with the mandate to use and care for his creation, God expected better. God has the long-term in mind. He has a stewardship mindset and we will be held accountable for the way we care for this garden Earth.

If you spend some time reading and studying scripture (especially Leviticus 25) and reflect on some of the laws that God through Moses set in place while the people of Israel were still in the desert, you can't help but notice God's stewardly design that permeates through it all. He clearly laid out how his people were to treat land. In fact, he clearly indicated that he retains the land and assigns it to the Israelites – it cannot be sold but only the value of its produce can. The land is an inheritance for the family to whom it was given and must return to the rightful owner in the year of jubilee.

God called his people to observe a Jubilee every seven years and give the land rest. Israelites were not to cultivate in the year of Jubilee. Even today, some of the fundamentals of good land stewardship are based on sound Biblical principles for land care. Christian farmers today who are committed to caring stewardship practice fallow periods, crop rotations, green and regular manuring that provides a recharge of organic matter to the soil. Such practices serve to sustain the productive potential of the land.

However, these practices require an integration of live-stock and field crops. The move away from diversified farm operations has made it almost impossible or uneconomical for cash croppers to be able to provide a good recharge of organic matter to the soil. Those who fork out the extra cost to do so are at a disadvantage with farmers who don't care to invest in these good practices – at least in the short term. There are costs to good land stewardship but there are also long-term benefits!

mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Many people find that setting aside time for Scripture reading and reflection at the beginning or end of the day works well. Some create a tranquil spot in their home that they can retreat to in order to facilitate this. Even 15 minutes a day is a good start.

All of the above practices are a worthwhile investment of time because, as spouses and parents, taking care of ourselves enables us to give the best possible care to our family.

Moreover, as Christians, ensuring we are functioning at our best allows us to put maximum effort into building God's kingdom.



Reflections on Stewardship

Rick DeGraaf

In Africa along the fringes of the Sahara desert, tree nursery programs by organizations like CRWRC strive to re-establish trees while providing work for unemployed or underemployed people. Decades of cutting trees and overgrazing has a terrible price and has made many areas of Africa vulnerable and marginally habitable as temperatures soar and droughts become common place. Agro-forestry, the blend of agriculture and forestry, holds the most promise to change the situation. Agriculture and Forestry must work together to restore a more favourable microclimate to facilitate a healthy water/transpiration cycle for both food production and human habitation.

Our land is a precious and limited resource – even in Canada. In Ontario, organizations such as the Ontario Farmland Trust [http://www.farmland.uoguelph.ca/ofl/ofl.htm] strive to keep good farmland in Ontario in agriculture. It's a battle. So many other factors work against keeping good land in agriculture. Cities demand more space and agricultural land is cheap. Many farmers are near retirement and fewer young men and women want to pursue farming as a career. New factories like Toyota in Woodstock are attracted to farmland near the 401 corridor. The land is cheap for development but too expensive for farming as the returns have not been there to cover the cost (recent increased prices for grains are offering some hope). The prospect of selling a good farm to a speculator for development versus a commitment to keep the farm in agriculture by way of an easement (arranged through the Ontario Farmland Trust) usually results in a lower farm-selling price. Many are not willing to make that sacrifice – after all it's their retirement saving fund!

Land: God entrusted it to us to work it and care for it as in Genesis 1: 15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Let's do our part!

Stewardly tip: Soil care – Planting trees, composting scraps and leaves, digging in manure and compost into our gardens, mulching grass clippings and holding back the chemicals are all ways that we can be better stewards of the land under our immediate care. Don't have any manure or enough compost? Visit a farm and ask for some and when you do encourage his/her land stewardship – a farmer has a special stewardship responsibility. Dig in the nutrients and put them where they'll do the most good.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to Christian Courier or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Day 4 – Hanging lamps

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Church

Rick Warren: Mainline church problems need evangelical solution

Marian Van Til

WASHINGTON – (with files from *Christian Post*) Megachurch pastor Rick Warren and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* suggested recently that mainline churches need to reconcile with evangelicals in order to counter the mounting problem of mainline membership decline.

"In a pluralistic world we [Christians] need to be on the same team because we share the same Savior," Warren asserted when speaking with the dean of the Washington (D.C.) National Cathedral, Samuel T. Lloyd III. The cathedral is the second-largest Episcopal church in the U.S.

Lloyd, meanwhile, admitted that evangelical churches are thriving and full of vitality, while most mainline denominations are confronting worrisome membership decline. Lloyd asked Warren for his point of view during one of the cathedral's weekly Sunday forums called "Critical Issues in the Light of Faith."

"One hundred years ago the phrase 'social gospel' first came out," Warren responded. "Some people took that to mean that we only need to reform the social government and society, and [need] no personal faith in Christ Jesus; that is, if we make the world a better place we don't need personal redemption."

Biblically orthodox believers refused to accept that. It led to mainline churches going one way and evangelical churches another, Warren said. In general, mainline churches focused on social morality such as fighting poverty, racism and economic justice. Evangelical churches concentrated on personal morality such as individuals' salvation, fighting pornography and upholding "family values."

"Who's right? The fact is both are right," Warren said. "We need both." He reminded the audience that Jesus taught his followers "to love God with all their heart, mind and soul, as well as to love their neighbors as themselves. You can't just love your neighbor; you've got to love God. And you can't just love God; you have to love your neighbors. Mainline Protestant and evangelical – we need both wings."

Small groups are the key

Earlier in the program Warren talked about his 20,000-member Saddleback Church, based in Lake Forest, California (Orange County). It has six weekend services and runs more than 400 ministries which reach out to different segments of society, including prison ministry and programs helping people infected with HIV/AIDS.

The megachurch pastor praised the small groups that meet in people's homes and strengthen the Saddleback Church. There are more than 3,600 such groups stretching 100 miles away from the main church campus – at least one in every city in southern California. The church offers 22 different worship styles across its campus on Sunday and Saturday, but everybody listens to the same sermon. "God likes variety," Warren said with a laugh.

Even so, he observed that there are more people meeting in small groups each week – some 30,000 – than attending the church's services. "I could drop dead right now and the church would still be growing," Warren quipped, half-seriously. The church is not built around him one, high-profile person: Warren spends only about half the year preaching at Saddleback. The rest of the time he speaks and trains pastors around the world.

Besides membership decline, many mainline churches also report declines in financial contributions. Warren said his church does "zero" fundraising, but instead teaches biblical stewardship and generosity. Saddleback raised \$7 million for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts and \$1.6 million for the 2004 tsunami with one simple announcement made from the pulpit.

Others say Warren and his wife, Kay, have led the church by example. The couple tithed the standard 10 per cent during their first year of marriage, but raised it one per cent each year thereafter – 12 percent during their second year of marriage, 13 percent in their third year of marriage, and so forth. But after the phenomenal success of Warren's book *The Purpose-Driven Life* made them wealthy, the couple practiced reverse tithing, giving 90 per cent to Christian missions and causes and living on 10 per cent.

The Purpose-Driven Life is the best-selling hardback in U.S. history and one of the best sellers in the world.



Pope says ask yourself: Do I practice idolatry?

VATICAN CITY (with files from Zenit.org). – Pope Benedict XVI says that Christ's zeal for his Father's house should lead Christians today to reflect: "Is our faith pure and open enough that, beginning from it, the 'pagans' – the persons today who are seeking and have their questions – can also intuit the light of the one God, can associate themselves with our prayer in the atriums of faith, and by their seeking perhaps become worshippers?"

On Palm Sunday, which was also diocesan-level Youth Day in the Roman Catholic Church worldwide, the Gospel lesson told of the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, when Christ drives out those who had made it a "den of thieves."

When Christ arrives at the temple, the Pope said, "there, where should be the space of the meeting between God and man, he finds people selling animals, and money changers who use the place of prayer for their business.... The God of Israel, the God of all people, was always awaiting their prayer, their seeking, their invocation. But now, the atrium was dominated by business, business that had been legalized by the competent authority, an authority which, for its part, had a part of the merchants' earnings."

Greed is idolatry

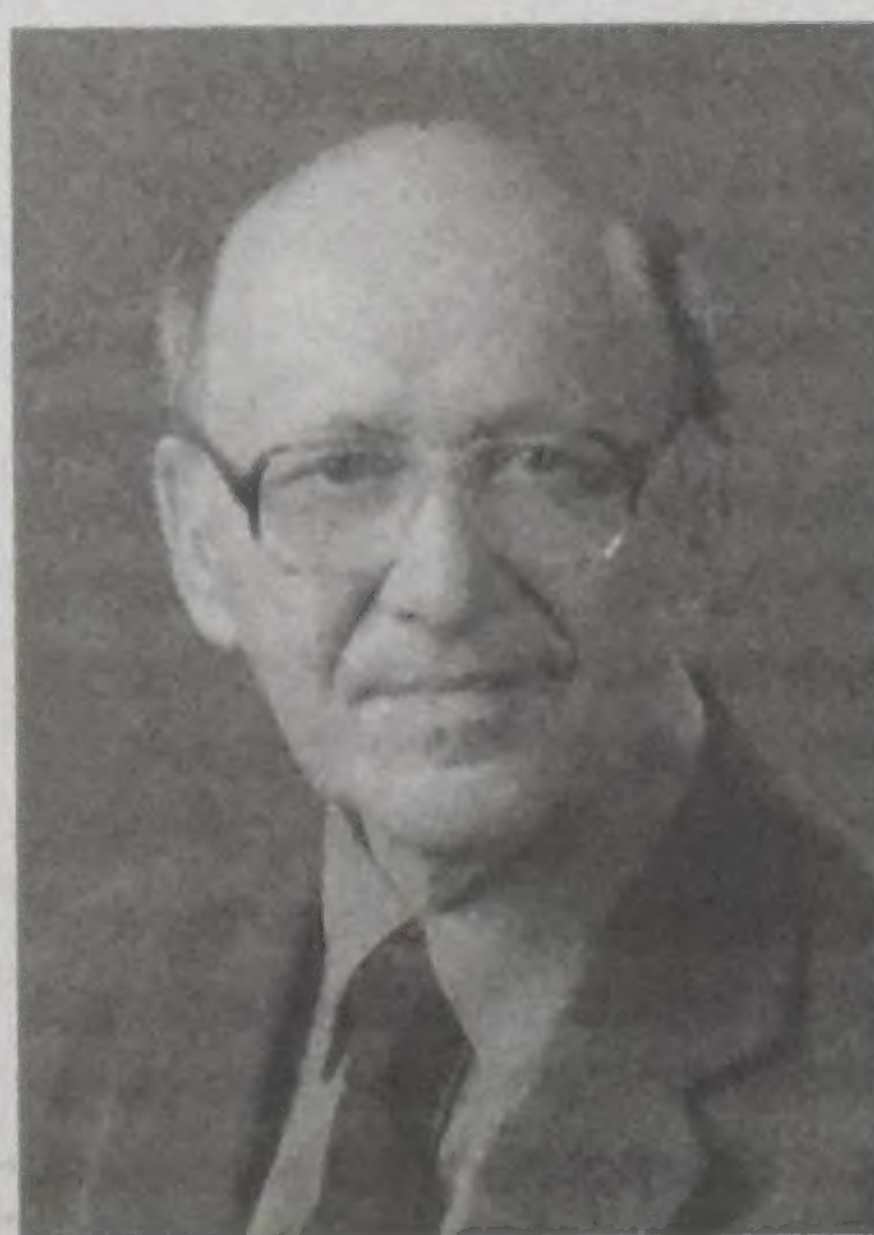
"Does the awareness that greed is idolatry also

reach our heart and our life practices? Do we not perhaps also allow idols to enter even into the world of our faith? Are we disposed to let the Lord purify us again and again, allowing him to chase out of us and the Church what is contrary to him?"

The Pope went on to say that Christ's action in the temple shows that a new moment in history was initiated. "The fact that Jesus now chases out the merchants doesn't only impede abuse, but indicates the new action of God," said Benedict. "The new temple is formed: Jesus Christ himself, in whom God's love comes down to us. He, in his life, is the new and living temple. He, who passed through the cross and is risen, is the living space of spirit and life in which the right worship is realized. Thus, the purification of the temple, as the culmination of Jesus's solemn entry into Jerusalem, is the sign both of the incumbent destruction of the building and the promise of the new temple; the promise of the Kingdom of reconciliation and love that, in communion with Christ, is established beyond every frontier.

Benedict XVI affirmed that if we are to recognize this loving God, "we must abandon the pride that blinds us, that wants to drive us far away from God, as if God were our competitor. To meet God it is necessary to become capable of seeing with the heart."

Polish priest-cosmologist awarded for connecting faith and science



Chris Herlinger

New York (ENI) – Michal Heller, a Polish Roman Catholic priest and cosmologist whose intellectual and religious life has been grounded in the insights of both science and faith, has won the 2008 Templeton Prize, believed to be the largest yearly monetary award

given to a single individual (\$1.6 million US).

Heller, 72, teaches at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow. He was chosen for the prize for his work in connecting physics, cosmology, theology and philosophy. The formal awarding will take place in London on May 7.

Heller has long opposed the now popular belief that there are "two worlds" of religion and science and they are at odds. Without the meaning afforded by faith, "science would be meaningless," he says. He has had a long interest in examining such questions as "Does the universe need to have a cause?" He has engaged sources from various disciplines that might otherwise have little in common, the John Templeton Foundation said in announcing Heller's winning of the prize.

"Michael Heller's quest for deeper understanding has led to pioneering breakthroughs in religious

concepts and knowledge as well as expanding the horizons of science," John M. Templeton Jr, the president of the John Templeton Foundation, said in a statement in conjunction with the announcement of the award at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York.

Heller says he had "always wanted to do the most important things, and what can be more important than science and religion? Science gives us Knowledge, and religion gives us Meaning. Both are prerequisites of the decent existence."

He credits the grounding of his beliefs partly in the background of his parents. His father, Kazimierz, was an electrical and mechanical engineer as well as a painter who instilled in the young Heller a sense of the unity of science and faith. This happened at a time when the family was trying to find its bearings after being first deported, like some one million other Poles, to Siberia under orders of Joseph Stalin, followed by war-time transfers to the Volga region of the Soviet Union and then, eventually to western Poland.

The experience of the Second World War gave Heller a sense of a higher calling. "Without higher motives, life is vegetation, it's not human life," observed Heller in describing how his determination to excel academically led him on a path that combined the Catholic priesthood and academia.

Heller said he plans to use the Templeton money to help create a planned Copernicus centre that, in conjunction with Jagiellonian University and the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow, will promote science and theology as an academic discipline.

Church

Southern Baptists 'singing a new song' – and quite a few old ones

Marian Van Til

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (files from BP) – “Amazing Grace” is still there. And “Holy, Holy, Holy” too. But so are “Sanctuary” and “Shout to the Lord.”

When a denomination publishes a new hymnal it is of far more than passing interest to church members. Music uniquely touches the heart. And when that music is what's sung in church as an expression of communal theology and individuals' faith it has been known to cause battles.

That doesn't appear to be happening with *LifeWay Worship*, the new hymnal just released by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). “We have composers from Beethoven to Fanny Crosby to Travis Cottrell represented in this hymnal,” says Mike Harland, director of *LifeWay Worship*, a part of LifeWay Christian Resources of the SBC. “There is a good mix of hymns, worship music and praise choruses.”

There are 674 in all, of which 300 are new to the hymnal. Of those 300, two-thirds have been published in other hymnals, but “about 100 are brand-new hymns and songs that haven't been published in any hymnal before,” Harland notes. An additional 250 titles are included in the *WorshipCharts*, *WorshipTracks* and selected *WorshipMedia* accompaniment editions.

“The selection process was arduous,” Harland said. “There are many hymns and worship songs that are wonderful, spiritually uplifting songs, but our task was to choose the best, most theologically sound songs we could.”

The Southern Baptists proceeded much like the Christian Reformed Church did when a new edition of the *Psalter Hymnal* was needed – and as most churches proceed. It gathered a committee of theologians and musicians to look at every hymn to make certain the theology was trustworthy before the song moved forward to the next level of consideration.

Ten important questions

“The hymnal is more than a ‘song book’ to meet a utilitarian need for the congregant,” Duncan said. “This hymnal, as with past editions of the *Baptist Hymnal*, serves many functions, including providing a historical document of doctrinal beliefs of the family of faith known as Baptists.” Substitute any church name, but that will still be true.

Each song's suitability was based on 10 fundamental questions. They are questions that can well be asked by worship planners, musicians and song leaders and other choosers of music each Sunday in any Christian church.

- * Does the hymn speak biblically of God?
- * Is it God-honoring?
- * Does it present a biblical view of man?
- * Does it help us to cover the depth and breadth of our theology?
- * Does it call us to true discipleship, service, repentance, witness, missions and devotion?
- * Does it speak biblically of salvation?
- * Does it engage the whole person – allowing a person to express his or her deepest feelings?
- * Does the hymn emphasize that Christ is the Christian's Lord, Master and King? (the idea of total submission).
- * Does the hymn avoid presenting a [North] Americanized/Westernized gospel? (civil religion).
- * Is there a balance with corporate and individual response in worship (immanence and transcendence)?

“The teaching impact through singing our hymns cannot be understated,” said Duncan. “We learn our theology through the songs we sing in church.”

“There is an excitement from the churches about the new hymnal,” Harland said. “Despite what seems to be a trend, a vast majority of our churches still use hymnals.”

Christian publisher moves to eco-friendly Bibles

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Christian Post) – The world's largest Christian publisher announced recently that it is beginning a complete transition to environmentally conscious Bible binding and practices.

Thomas Nelson, Inc.'s Bible group is in the beginning stages of discontinuing the use of synthetic covers on their Bible products. The decision makes Thomas Nelson the first Bible publisher to announce a complete transition to eco-friendly Bible production.

“As a publisher of Bibles for over 200 years, Thomas Nelson has always striven to bring Scripture into people's lives while also addressing their evolving needs and concerns. We're happy to be leading the way in providing environmentally friendly Bibles in keeping with the concerns of today's consumers,” commented Wayne Hastings, Senior Vice President and Group Publisher for Thomas Nelson's Bible Group, in a statement.

“In moving away from oil-based covers we're not only honoring our customers' needs, but we're also honoring our Godly calling to be good stewards of the things he has given to us.”

Due to production schedule, some products to be released

in the coming months will still include these materials, but customers can expect significant eco-friendly Bibles in stores in early 2009, informed the publisher.

Bibles in bonded leather, leather, and hardcover formats will continue to be available through Thomas Nelson. But the company will also pursue covers made with specialty papers, fabrics and other options in its effort to be eco-friendly. The company's LeatherSoft bind will be included in the phase-out, and current synthetic materials will be reproduced with “green” binding material.

“We're taking a stand to make sure that all Bible products are eco-friendly,” said George Gower, Vice President of Inventory Management Production for Thomas Nelson. “All polyurethane/oil-based covers will be eliminated and replaced with recyclable and recycled materials. In fact, inside cover sheets and other selected types of Bible products that use materials from ecological fibers will go up to 100 per cent recyclable with some offerings being 100 per cent post-consumer.”

The publisher predicts the total phase-out period will be completed in the next three to five years.

SPE project sparks movement of excellence

March 14, 2008 – A culture of sharing, friendship and commitment to life-long learning is developing among pastors in the Christian Reformed Church, says a report that evaluates the denomination's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program.

The evaluation report, received by the CRC Board of Trustees at its meeting in Grand Rapids in February, paints a very positive picture of the program that began in 2003 with the aid of a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

The intent of the SPE project has been to create a culture of pastoral excellence in the CRC. It offers funding for peer learning groups, continuing education events, and one-on-one mentoring between new and experienced pastors.

To date, nearly 60 percent of CRC pastors have participated in the program.

Within the five-year period, 106 peer learning groups, involving 516 pastors, were formed. In addition, from 2003 to 2007, 134 events were held with more than 1,800 pastors and 1,900 laypersons attending (participants were counted each time they attended an event).

The five-year evaluation included interviews with 55 pastors who represent a cross-section of congregations across North America. The evaluation was conducted by Susan M. Weber, a peer facilitator for the Lilly Endowment.

“Of primary importance is the fact that the SPE program received impressive feedback from virtually all of its participants,” says the report's executive summary. “The program is held in high regard for its organization and superb administration.”

Rev. Jerry Dykstra, the CRC's executive director, said he is pleased that the Lilly Endowment has awarded the program a new five-year grant of nearly \$1 million to continue its work.

The evaluation report notes that one pastor said he initially was skeptical about becoming involved with an SPE peer group. “Over the quarter century of my ministry, I've taken part in almost every form of continuing education,” he said. “But I'm convinced the SPE is the most significant program for pastors that the CRC has introduced in my years of service.”

The pastor gave the program high marks for helping break down the isolation “that has been a trademark of ordained ministry in the denomination.” In addition, he said, SPE challenges pastors with a form of continuing education that helps them to grow intellectually as well as spiritually.

“The spiritual vitality that it nurtures in pastors helps create the leadership needed for the denomination to pursue its goal of healthy congregations,” he said.

The success of SPE led the CRC to create a new Sustaining Congregational Excellence Program that is being funded by the denomination itself.

“The SPE program has clearly enabled the denomination to become open to innovation, change, and life-long learning evidence in part by the newly launched Sustaining Congregational Excellence program,” says the report. “Many (of the pastors interviewed) believed that SPE is no longer a program, but a ‘movement’ throughout the denomination.”

Overall, the Lilly Endowment has funded 63 SPE projects, of which the CRC's is one.

Looking ahead, CRC plans to use its current Lilly grant, which began in January 2008, to find ways to implement the lessons of the SPE across the entire denomination, including all of its boards, agencies and institutions. For more information about the SPE project, visit www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence.

Chris Meehan, CRC Communications



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Opinion

Christianity and Islam: What common ground? Part II

The Yale response submitted in its language to the Muslim terminology. It is a dhimmi response, not a response of equal dialogue partners who both assert and explain what they truly believe. (Jochen Katz, "The Yale Response and 'the Prophet Muhammad'")

Harry Antonides

The responses to the "Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders" to their Christian counterparts, published in October 2007, brought to the fore a wide gulf between the two world religions. But it also brought into the open the painful reality that there exists a deep cleavage right within the household of contemporary Christianity.

On the one hand, a number of leading orthodox (in distinction from liberal) Christian leaders were outspoken in their rejection of the Open Letter's attempt to whitewash the fundamental difference between the two religions. On the other hand, some influential professional academic and church leaders have responded enthusiastically to this Muslim initiative. Their reasoning tell us a great deal about the state of Christianity in the West.

A clear demonstration is the letter "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You," published in the *New York Times* of November 18, 2007 (www.acommonword.com). This document was drafted by four scholars at Yale's Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture, and endorsed by almost 300 other theologians and leaders. The same scholars are planning a series of major conferences and workshops to promote constructive engagement among international Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders.

Fawning deference

What is striking about this important letter of response is the totally uncritical attitude toward the Muslim leaders' redefinition of Christianity (see Part I). No less telling is their uncritical acceptance of the Muslims' sanitized version of what the Koran and hadith actually teach, and their silence about the long history of those who preach and practise hatred in the name of Islam. The overriding tone of this response is one of fawning deference.

The Yale scholars write that they were "deeply encouraged and challenged" by what they call the "historic open letter" which they receive as "a Muslim hand of

conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians worldwide." They regret that relations between the two religions have sometimes been hostile, and then proceed to imply that it is especially the Christians who have been guilty. They single out the Crusades and the present excesses of the "war on terror" and ask "forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and the Muslim community around the world."

The Crusades happened almost a thousand years ago, an event that Muslims one-sidedly present as a major crime committed by Christians. The ambiguous phrase "excesses of the war on terror" for which Christians are supposedly responsible shifts the attention away from the real terrorists who have killed more fellow Muslims than any Western army – and who continue to commit such crimes every day.

The respondents to the Muslim letter agree that the future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. They applaud its stress on the fact that the foundation for agreement and peace between Christians and Muslims is possible because of what is central to both: love of God and love of neighbour.

They write that they find deep affinities with their own Christian faith and the claim of the Muslim letter when it "insists that love is the pinnacle of our duties toward our neighbors." They then proceed to juxtapose Muhammad's alleged saying that faith without love of the neighbour is impossible with Jesus' statement to the same effect.

Without any sign of irony, they accept at face value the Muslims' claim that in the absence of justice and freedom, there cannot be any love for God or the neighbour. They simply repeat the Muslim assertion that Islam, too, stands for freedom of religion, and that Muslims are not against the Christians.

They then quote Jesus' saying in Matthew 5 where he instructs his followers to love their enemies and even pray for their persecutors, hastening to add that Muhammad expressed a similar sentiment when he was violently rejected and attacked. They write that Muhammad is known to have said: "The

most virtuous behavior is to engage those who sever relations, to give to those who withhold from you, and to forgive those who wrong you."

They reiterate their admiration for the Muslims' generosity in writing their "courageous letter", calling for interfaith dialogue aimed at reshaping relations between our communities and our nations. They call this a daunting task in which the stakes are great, given "the deep fissures in the relations between Christians and Muslims today." They conclude:

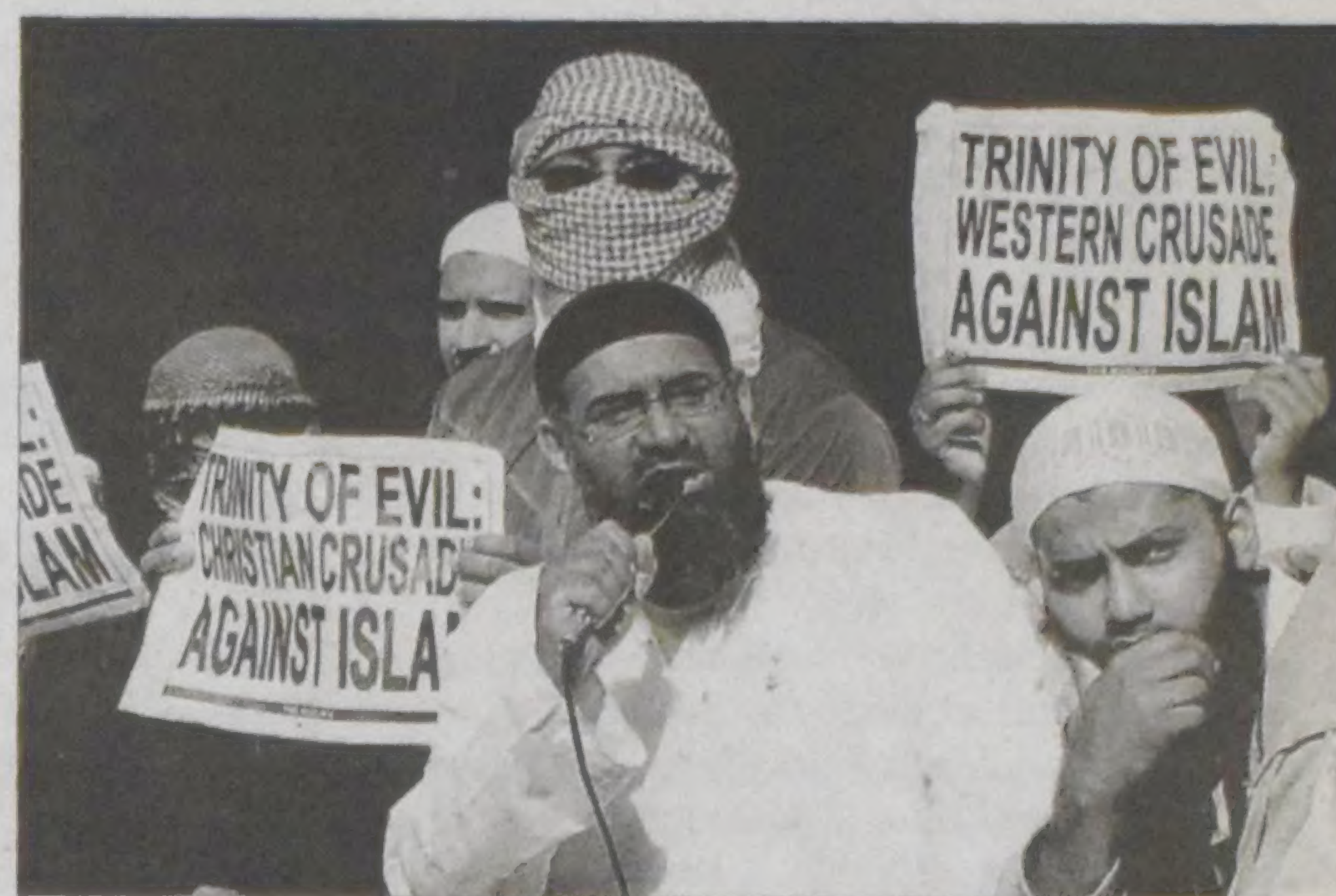
If we fail to make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony you correctly remind us that "our eternal souls" are at stake as well. We are persuaded that our next step should be for our leaders at every level to meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another. It is with humility and hope that we receive your generous letter, and we commit ourselves to labor together in heart, soul, mind and strength for the objectives you so appropriately propose.

Where to start with rightly evaluating this strange and far-fetched letter. I already mentioned the tone of fawning deference. But there is more that deserves our critical scrutiny. Let me briefly concentrate on the misrepresentation here of the Islamic scriptures as well as the history of Islam.

What did Muhammad really believe?

Here I will assume that Muhammad's beliefs are always in accordance with the instructions of the Koran. One problem is that the Koran contains verses that contradict each other. Yet it is quite clear that Muhammad's message was, as we saw in Part I, that those who hold to the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible are guilty of "monstrous blasphemy," who are cursed and destined for hell.

Further, while the Muslim letter writers profess to believe in freedom of religion, the Koran and hadith have a very different message. It's a message of hatred for all infidels who must become Muslim, be subjugated or killed if they refuse. If Muslims are a minority, as in Western countries, they are duty bound to strive for the



Anjem Choudary: 'Warning to those who insult Islam'

gradual spread of Islam.

Trying to convince the readers that Muhammad and Jesus preach the same love is belied by everything we know about Muhammad's life and practice. It is remarkable that we know this not from the critics, but directly from the Koran and other Islamic sources.

There is no confusion about the fact that Muhammad established his rule, especially from the time of his Medina period in 622, by attacking and robbing caravans, having his enemies beheaded, including the Jewish poet Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf who showed disrespect for Muhammad. Another poet, Abu Afak, who had mocked Muhammad, was also assassinated.

A similar fate awaited Asma Bint Marwan, a poetess who expressed her dislike for Muhammad in verse. He asked his followers: "Will no one rid me of this daughter of Marwan?" One man took on the grisly assignment, and killed her when she was sleeping with her baby. When the killer met Muhammad next morning at the mosque, he seemed to have some doubts about what he had done to a defenceless woman. But Muhammad put him at ease and told him: "You have helped God and His Apostle. A couple of goats will hardly knock their heads together for it."

Some Jewish tribes who refused to acknowledge Muhammad as their religious leader were exiled and lost all their belongings. The worst treatment was meted out to the Jewish Qurayyah tribe of whom all the men were beheaded – the number reportedly killed ranges from 600 to 900 men. Their women and children were sold into slavery. Muhammad committed the

ultimate in cruelty when he forced the wife of one of the murdered Jews to become his wife.

Deeds speak louder than words

Why mention these horrendous deeds? I do so because Muhammad by his words and deeds inspired the Muslim warriors who in the next one hundred years managed to extend Islam from the Middle East, into North Africa, Spain, India and Eastern Europe. The same inspiration today moves those Muslims who preach and practise hatred toward Christians and Jews, and especially Israel.

Some of them have come to the West, where in many mosques, funded by Arab money and manned by radical imams, they are told that their first obligation is to further the rule of Allah, and not to assimilate in the nation where they reside. Polls among Muslim immigrants in the West consistently show a high proportion that supports the jihadists, while a larger number favour the introduction of sharia law.** (A Pew Research Center poll in May, 2007 found that one in four younger U.S. Muslims supported suicide bombings in some circumstances.)

Furthermore, the Muslims who murdered 3000 people on 9/11 were convinced that they were following in Muhammad's footsteps and obeying the Koran which calls on them to slay the infidel. Thousands have died since and continue to die or suffer horrible wounds nearly every day. We also know that every day in thousands of schools in Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Islamic countries tens of thousands of young, unformed minds are poisoned by the warlike

Contentment

instructions of the Koran.

The Muslim leaders wrote that they are also committed to freedom of religion because it follows from our duty to love our neighbour. The Yale scholars simply reiterate that, but it is especially here that we should ask those who speak on behalf of worldwide Islam some hard questions.

Words by themselves are meaningless; no worse, they are deceiving if they are not matched by deeds. The truth is that in many Islamic countries, Christians are persecuted, killed and their buildings burned down. These things are not hidden. We can hear about them every day.

It is these bitter realities that compel us to believe that at least a significant part of Islam believers takes the warlike verses of the Koran and the hadith seriously. To ignore these realities, and to proclaim that Islam and Christianity have in common their belief in God and their commitment to freedom of religion, is to ask us to believe the unbelievable.

If the Muslim authors are sincere, they should be prepared to start immediately with raising a public, persistent, and unmistakably clear demand to all Islamic authorities in the world to free all imprisoned Christians and halt all measures that discriminate against every non-Muslim. Such a change would obviously have to include the complete freedom for Muslims to change their religion.

Conclusion

In summary, the respondents to the Muslim letter, by not enunciating the truth about the Christian faith but conceding the Muslim definition of Christianity, contributed to a serious misunderstanding about the very heart of the Gospel: the deity of Christ and his atoning death and resurrection.

By glossing over the reality of Islamic oppression of Christians (and all non-Muslims), and its imperialistic political ambition that allows no separate spheres for the religious and the political, the respondents failed to come to the aid of millions of helpless victims in Muslim countries.

By not reminding Muslim leaders of their responsibility to counteract the deadly jihadist ideology, the respondents failed in their duty to be truth tellers over against the lies that feed the hatred toward the free West.

The Yale University logo, *Lux et Veritas* (*Light and Truth*), is derived from biblical religion. In this encounter with Islam, the Yale scholars betrayed their sacred duty to let the light of truth shine in a world threatened by darkness and lies.

But let the last word not be one of criticism and failure. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims of goodwill is needed and possible. Now is the time for Bible-believing Christians to take the initiative in publicly articulating the significance of the Christian faith for the modern world.

What is needed is a thoughtful public document, infused with biblical truth and light, about living with our differences in a peaceful world. We need to move from a position of reaction and criticism to one of initiative and participation.

*http://www.answering-islam.org/Letters/yale_prophet_Muhammad.htm

** For a detailed description of Muslim infiltration into Europe and America, see BatYe'or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*; and Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America*.

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Love thy labor

It's always exciting when a new business opens up on the main street of our little town. "Evergreen Variety" had started in a smaller location, but now it had moved to a large storefront downtown. I thought I'd check it out. The minute I stepped through the door, a young Mennonite woman greeted me with a bright smile. "Hello there," she said. "Come to have a look around? Well, there's a lot to see." With a sweeping gesture she motioned toward the plethora of merchandise in the store.

Large sacks of flour and potatoes were piled close to the door. Neatly organized aisles of grocery items and bulk goods filled the centre section, and several coolers and freezers lined the wall along one side. Baked goods were at the back. The other half of the store featured sewing notions and quilting supplies, handmade baby clothes, little navy blue jackets, like the ones young Mennonite boys wear, (I've always wondered where those come from), and an assortment of used dishes, from casseroles to crystal. In one corner stood a large bookcase full of used books.

I meandered through the store, surprised at the abundant inventory – literally everything from soup to nuts – often in huge quantities, suitable for feeding a big family. The enthusiastic owner stood nearby as I opened one of the freezers to look inside. "Did you know we have another whole floor of stuff?" she asked, tucking a stray lock of brown hair into her kerchief. "Just go over there by the books, and you'll see the stairs going down."

Downstairs rows of shelves displayed countless pairs of black leather shoes, precisely lined up according to size, used, but polished and in good shape. There were also some new rubber boots and a rack of hikers. All that footwear made me smile. Something for everyone. I had been in this building many times over the years when it held other businesses, never even knowing it had a basement.

Back on the main floor I grabbed a package of chocolate chip cookies and headed for the checkout. The Mennonite lady was putting the finishing touches on a handmade sign. Two little girls stood by, smiling shyly at me. She rang in the cookies. "These come in every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. They bake them in the morning and deliver them in the afternoon. Can't get them any fresher," she said as she handed me my change.

"You've done a lot of work here," I said.

"Oh, we're not finished. We'll be putting in more coolers and you'll have to come in every week to find out the specials. And in the summer we're going to sell ice cream cones." Her energy was almost contagious. I left the store knowing I'd be back another time. I don't need potatoes by the sack or enormous quantities of baking supplies, but who can resist fresh cookies and such exuberant service?

I have to admit that I envy the pleasure this woman takes in her business. It's been awhile since I've been that excited about my work. Matter of fact, I've been known to whine a bit about some of the tasks on my to-do-list. At times I'm embarrassingly adept at avoidance and procrastination, putting off jobs until they're overdue, which only adds to the pressure of getting them done. I would do well to take a lesson from my entrepreneurial friend and learn to better appreciate the lovely variety of jobs God gives me.

I've noticed the shelves of Christian bookstores are filled these days with guides for enjoying life and loving one's work. Many offer advice on discovering your God-given abilities and using that information to determine your calling. I wonder about that a little. I agree that God has gifted each of us uniquely, and that he is best served when we're happy with our life's work. But sometimes you can't work at doing what you love, so you have to work at loving

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke



what you do. Maybe that's why they call it *work*.

I think back to my father's lifetime. The family immigrated to northern Ontario in the late 1950s, and from there moved to the city of Hamilton. My father applied to Stelco for a job. In Germany he was a master blacksmith, skilled with his hands, and blessed with an artisan's heart. Stelco hired him as a rigger on the mechanical field force. Two weeks later a strike shut down the plant for the whole summer.

In the meantime, my father took a position with a small company that made wrought iron railings. He liked his boss and the friendly co-workers. The job provided ample opportunity to use both his skills and his creativity. He worked daytime hours with weekends off. When Stelco called him back at the end of the strike, Pa had a big decision to make. While he loved the smaller company, the pay and benefits couldn't compare to the big steel plant. With a family to support and a mortgage to carry, he chose Stelco and worked there faithfully for nearly twenty years.

There were days when "fulfilling" wasn't the word he used to describe his job. Many times the stress ran high. But overall he enjoyed his work. He rarely complained, and seldom missed a shift. He did what he had to do for the sake of his family. In that way, it truly was a "labor of love."

And I think about the work God called his Son to do. Christ came to this earth to complete a specific mission. His job was to do his Father's will. He carried out that task in perfect obedience, never once complaining. He did what he had to do for the sake of those entrusted to his care. The work of the cross was the ultimate labor of love. Even so, the anticipation of it turned anguished beads of sweat into blood as he prayed. Hardly a cheerful proposition, but thank the Lord, he never backed down.

Some self-help guru recently summarized what people need to be content into a trio of essentials: Someone to love; something to do; and something to look forward to. As Christians, we have all three, don't we? We are to love others ahead of ourselves and God above all. We are to do the will of God and work at whatever we do wholeheartedly, as for the Lord. And one day, by the grace of God through the work of Christ, we have heaven to look forward to. That should keep us busy. Not to mention happy. I'll try to keep that in mind as I fill in the pages of my *DayMinder* this week.

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Meditation

The King of Glory

Here we launch a series of meditations by Abraham Kuyper translated by Jack van Meggelen. They are taken from the third volume of a series on Celebrating your Holy Days. After Christmas and Easter, this volume deals with Pentecost and has a brief introduction about Ascension Day.

Van Meggelen says, "Kuyper's style is very conversational and directed at the relatively uneducated Christians he addressed in the popular Christian Press in his time. He is convinced that Pentecost has lost much of its meaning among the people in the church and he wishes to correct that by writing this little book. The chapters are short and to the point, calling his readers to repentance by embracing the Holy Spirit as God, who came to live among us and in us."

The series will include eight meditations on Christ's ascension and eighteen on Pentecost.

FOREWORD

On Pentecost the church of God makes its entry in history as the Universal or Catholic Church into the world. Once before the church also had a 'Universal' or 'Catholic' character. In Paradise. In the days of Noah. In the days when Terah traveled in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans.

However, since the call of Abraham, this church had become exclusive and confined inside the national boundaries of Israel. From that time on she was no longer Universal or Catholic, but rather the church of a particular people in the narrowest sense of the word, and she remained that way until Pentecost. On that day she shed the confinement to one nation or people and became as of old, the universal church.

All this followed from the Ascension. The Head of the church no longer ruled just from Jerusalem on mount Zion, but from the Jerusalem which is above, from there he rules his church for all "people" and nations on the earth. The holy apostle Paul comes close to serenading the covert fact in his moving letters to the churches in Ephesus and Rome. Ascension and Pentecost belong together inseparably. Jesus ascended into Heaven so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out on all.

For that reason this third volume offers meditations about both salvation events. They will first lead you up to the heavenly Jerusalem, into the Tabernacle made by God and not human hands. From that tabernacle they will lead you back down to the church on earth, this time with the Comforter, in the company of the Holy Spirit.

Kuyper

Amsterdam, May 1st, 1888.

ASCENSION

Lift Up, Ye Ancient Doors

*Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

Who is he, this King of glory?

*The Lord Almighty -
he is the King of glory.*

Psalm 24:9, 10.

David, who wrote this Psalm, desired with heart and soul that he himself would build a temple for the Ark of the Lord. But the prophet came and said, 'Jahweh does not want you to do that. Not you, but your son Solomon will build the temple'. Once David was persuaded of this, he did not complain. Rather than challenge the edict, he accepted it, and rejoiced in what would be accomplished not by him, but by his son Solomon.

Oh, what a glorious day it would be when the ark of the

Lord would be carried into the completed temple. It seemed to David as if the dawn of that day had already broken. He saw all the details as if they were happening right before his eyes. Those beautiful parapets; those majestic walls; and finally the procession of the ark of the Lord, the abode of his grandeur, his majestic presence among his people! It seemed to David, that he could see beyond the ark and temple as if these were only a shadow and symbol of the glory of the coming King for whom the patriarchs already prayed.

Now he envisions the ark of the Lord ascending the holy hill of Zion until it is at the portal in the fortress wall. In that wall are gates, but the doors are too low and too humble for him for whose entry into glory the accent of the ark is but a symbol. This is why David sings a new song and in the Spirit he shouts, "Ye Gates, rise up from your humble state, expand, enlarge your entrance way. You, ancient doors expand and open for a royal entrance. For your King of Glory is coming to you, the Lord of all the hosts of heaven. He is the encouragement and delight of my soul!". It is clear that this Psalm points right at the inadequacy of the doors in the wall of Zion's fortress as David knew it. Jerusalem lies below and the temple is above. Between them is a solid wall with a mighty gate and its ancient doors. While anticipating the arrival of the Ark of the Lord he breaks out in jubilant praise, singing,

"Lift up your heads, ye gates,
And be raised up, ye eternal doors
for the King of Glory to enter!"

Who is the King of Glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord, mighty in battle."
And again,
"Lift up your heads, ye ancient gates,
Yes, be lifted up, ye eternal doors!
For the King of Glory must go in!"

Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory"

Still this is not yet the real event, because Zion itself was not the final reality.

Jerusalem, the temple, the ark in the temple, and even the wall around Zion separating Jerusalem from the Temple were all no more than signs of what was to come. They were all a mere visual aid; they provided an image of the real thing, pointing and directing Israel towards that which would always remain, the real and lasting eternal things.

These things are hidden from the wise, but not from the church of God, and especially not from his beloved and chosen ones.

That's why throughout the ages the church of God, with undoubted faith and certainty, has sung the songs of David about the ark of the Lord as a symbol and foreshadowing of Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Jerusalem in David's vision thirsted for the living God,



The Ascension by Andrea Mantegna, Italian, ca. 1431-1506

but the Lord lived on Zion. That wall and those ancient doors remained to separate them from God. He saw the Temple and knew of the ark of the covenant within, as a constant reminder of the presence of the Lord in their midst. But those wall were heavy, and the gates of those ancient doors were narrow.

David breaks through those limitations by singing, "Arise, oh my soul, and wake up you slumbering city of Jerusalem! There is a new beginning! A new promise of salvation! He comes, the King of Glory. Already the walls are disappearing and those restrictive doors are lifted up, so that the Ruler of the heavenly hosts can enter in; and all you who long for the coming of the Lord, shout with joy and sing a song of victory".

What do 'those ancient doors' really represent?

Discussion

They represent everything that separates Jerusalem from the ark of the Lord. And so they also represent everything that creates a barrier between the contrite hearts of the repentant sinners and the holiness of our glorious God.

Normally a door invites you to enter. However, this door is locked, secured with bolts and padlocks. This door keeps you out. The ancient door entices you to enter, yet with all your knocking and banging, the door remains closed. It does not budge! You finally get the message, that these are ancient doors and they will remain closed to you eternally.

But then comes the Messiah. God reaches out in mercy to sinners and sends a Saviour.

Will those ancient doors also keep him out? Definitely not!

Notice how the Holy Spirit through David prophesied that those ancient doors will drop their bolts and padlocks. They will open wide and be raised up so high that he, the King of Glory, can enter.

But note there is still another door.

First we encounter the 'ancient door' of our sinful nature, our flesh, which holds us in its grip, and will not let us go. But Christ breaks in through that door and appears to us in the Flesh. He has come so close to us, and has become just like a brother.

However, that still does not bring us there.

Indeed the Word has become flesh, and the Messiah is with us. But in coming to us we find him on our side of the door, in the place of affliction, and excluded from Zion, banned from the glory of heaven. The wall and the ancient doors are still closed before us.

For this reason, we must go forward in the flesh. We must go up to the mountain. From the lowly earth to the heights of heaven; to the place of God's Glory. Though weak on earth, in heaven the Messiah will truly become the mighty King, great in majesty, and fully able to save and rescue.

That's why we celebrate Ascension Day.

Up to Heaven! In that abode the weak become strong. There is heavenly power. And that power is exercised. That is exactly where our flesh has gone. Our Saviour in our flesh, that very same flesh and blood that hung in shame on the tree of Golgotha.

Notice now how the ancient doors have been raised to their full height!

And the King of Glory enters in.

He is your King, dear people of God, at whose disposal are all the treasures of heaven to give you salvation, to justify, and to redeem you completely.

He has gone through the ancient doors, into a temple greater than that of Solomon, one not made with human hands. Now your King lets his peace and blessings flow freely; his power reaches far and wide; and Satan slinks off, because the godless are being justified.

And even now the end of the story has not yet come.

There is still another ancient door. It is the ancient door of your heart, locked and bolted by Satan.

How often have you banged on that ancient door of your sinful heart in the hope of being freed from the fear and terror inside? You banged on that door hoping for freedom. But nothing came of it. Nothing you do can free you from the anxiety of your soul.

No one heard you.

Nothing else could open the ancient door of your sinful heart, until....

Until he came, the King of Glory. For when he sent his heralds from before his throne to bang on the ancient door of your heart with the hammer of his Word, you learned that "where the word of the King is, there is irresistible power". For they broke the lock and knocked its bolts right off and the ancient doors were raised up and the King of Glory entered. The Lord, mighty in deed. Hallelujah!

Can violence ever lead to peace?

Paul Kortenhoven

I have been asked to write a short article about the relationship, if there is one, between violence and peace. From an academic perspective, this would be almost a never ending task beginning with Augustine, going through the violent history of the pre-reformation church, the development of the traditional "peace" churches (Anabaptists, Mennonites and Quakers) and into the Bonhoeffer approach in Nazi Germany to the present day proclamations and theories of just war, pre-emption and proportionality.

So I have a different approach: drawing from my real experience as both a first-hand witness to and recipient of violence, and as a participant in the peace-making process of the civil war in Sierra Leone. From 1991-2002, our family was in this country with a few breaks necessitated by increasing violence and the possibility of imminent attacks by one of the most brutal and undisciplined rebel forces in the history of war in Africa. What I offer you is reality, not theory, and what I personally recommend is what I saw working in that horrible situation. I will do this through two short stories.

First: In 2001, twelve British soldiers were kidnapped by a notoriously murderous rebel group called the "West Side Boys." The British military decided to rescue them and they did this by means of a pre-dawn attack by the SAS (Special Air Service). In this rescue mission, one of the kidnapped British soldiers was killed and the other eleven were rescued un-harmed. Following the rescue, the SAS force did a search and destroy mission in the area and basically eliminated the "West Side Boys" and any future possibility of their being a threat to anyone or anything. Shortly after this incident, the entire rebel offensive had second thoughts about their chance of success in a civil war and finally began to seriously negotiate for some kind of favorable peace deal.

In order to re-enforce their presence and their ability to intervene, the British Navy staged regular mock invasions on the beaches of Freetown which were open to all (including any infiltrated rebel spies) who cared to watch them. This included a visible aircraft carrier on the horizon sending Hercules helicopters which landed troops and tanks on the beach while a dozen helicopter gunships buzzed overhead and then they enclosed the entire area in razor wire, all within one hour – a most impressive performance designed to intimidate, which it did very well.

Extreme violence perpetrated against the extremely violent rebel group was the main catalyst which led to the final working out of a peace accord, which held. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and their "West Side Boys" faction admitted publicly that they could not mount any kind of successful attack against any of the government forces as long as they were backed by the British forces. And the British forces made it very clear that they were not leaving until there was a peace established in the country. Peace came to Sierra Leone one year after this rescue mission.

Second: The United Nations had over 17,000 peace-keeping troops in Sierra Leone during the later years of the war (1998-2002). Until 1999 they were quite ineffective due to a command structure that did not believe in any offensive action unless there was an imminent threat to UN personnel or equipment. This

approach led to the kidnapping of several hundred UN troops in 1998, the theft of all their equipment, weapons and intelligence information, the murder and dismemberment of eight UN troops. In 1999, a new command was established under a Kenyan general. He believed that the UN had to take a different, stronger stance and when another offensive action of the rebels was directed against his UN troops, they responded immediately, repelled and eliminated the attacking rebels as well as the base that had been their home. Because this UN General made it very clear that his troops would continue to use this offensive approach whenever they saw either civilians or themselves under rebel threat, the threat was simply extinguished in that area. There was never another attack mounted against UN forces in Sierra Leone.

Again, the use of violence in reaction to an extremely violent attack by an extremely violent rebel force simply stopped them. Along with the British stance in Sierra Leone, this also was a main catalyst for peace.

My point? When you are in the very middle of a horribly brutal war, when you are burying dismembered bodies, when you are yourself ducking bullets and running from deadly attacks, you do not usually start thinking about Augustine's just war theory, or being a pacifist, or about your church's stand on non-violent resistance or being a second Ghandi. There is a time to do these things and that time is when there is peace. Continual discussion and debate by our philosophers and clerics, by our professors and agencies does not lead to peace when a war is raging. What leads to peace is serious and, at times, very violent intervention, and I would dare to say that we can do this in the name of a just and gracious Lord. We weep together at a world where such choices are simply necessary and may we look with joy to the time when they will not even be a thought. That is heaven! Won't it be great not to have to discuss such issues ever again?

Questions that may come:

- 1) How do you determine which violence is justified?
- 2) Should there be an international agreed upon peace making force that operates regionally to stop conflict like Rwanda, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Darfur from escalating into possible genocide?
- 3) Does biblical justice demand that Christians respond to stop violence against God's people, i.e. innocent civilians?
- 4) If you have the capability to intervene and stop escalating civil conflict, can you choose not to use it and remain true to your faith? To your commitment to implement God's justice?

The above article stimulated a good discussion on the CRC Justice Seekers website [<http://justiceseekers.ning.com/>]. The website also carries more information on various global issues such as the situation in Kenya. You can also join a discussion group and post or read blogs by other CRCers who have signed on with Justice Seekers.

CRC Justice Seekers is sponsored by the Christian Reformed Office of Social Justice, World Relief Committee, and World Missions

Corinthians

Saved from being lost eternally

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

1 Corinthians 15:17

A.A. van Ruler

Here Paul says that the Christian faith would not only be without content if there were no resurrection and thus also no resurrection of Christ, but that it would also be without fruit. Had Christ not risen then faith would not produce anything; it would be in vain, it wouldn't put any bread on the table. It would do nothing. In Luther's words, then it would not be a living, powerful force in us and in our lives.

That's a remarkable thought in itself: that faith as deed and attitude, as a form of life and way of being is working something out, and that this depends upon its content and object – the risen Christ. Faith is therefore a connecting canal by which the power of God, triumphantly perpetuated by Christ's resurrection, flows into and pours itself out in our earthly life in time. It is in faith too that the same all-conquering divine power reveals itself.

This thought becomes even more remarkable when we take note of what Paul says faith works out in human life. He says that if Christ had not arisen then your faith too would be without power, fruit and outcome. Then you would still be in your sins. Which is another way of saying that on the basis of Christ's resurrection true faith works out our liberation from sin in this life.

This is the fundamental idea of the gospel in all its unprecedented newness. By faith man is liberated from sin! This is something which we can never entirely comprehend. After all, sin is something we have committed. And anything done in time remains done, not just in time but to all eternity.

This is the terrible seriousness of human life. We only live once. Any particular moment in which we do a particular act cannot return. We must carry along the entire burden of our past lives with us. Yes, we are what we have done and experienced to this point in our lives. And it remains true for all eternity that time, including this moment in time and the deed performed in that moment in time once existed and was done. In this sense all that is present immediately becomes past, but it is still reckoned unto us.

It is even more terrible when we recall what is the true seriousness of human life. This seriousness does not consist in the fact that in our nature we are relative creatures,

that is, that we stand in a relationship – to God. We act before God's face. In all our doings we are engaged with God's world. In everything we do we are busy with things that are from God. When we do wrong, we play a reckless game, not first of all with our own property and possessions, but we toy with and spoil what is from God. Then we turn God's glory into darkness. We besmirch God's essence.

This is the terrible seriousness of sin – that it stains the essence of God. Sin distorts the goodness of created being in which God has displayed his glory. Therefore, sin brings guilt. This is what makes it irreversible. This is not just because it was committed in time, because it is temporal, but because of the guilt, that is, because it was committed against God. Guilt rather than time is the prison in which mankind finds himself. Being imprisoned in guilt is what Paul means when he speaks of "being in sin".

But, says, Paul and the entire New Testament, faith has enormous power – the power to free us from this prison. Through and in faith, we are no longer in our sins but we stand in the dizzying freedom of the new day, the new beginning.

This may not be something we fully experience, but it is something proclaimed to us. It is the gospel. Perhaps it can never be wholly experienced. It is simply too big and too overwhelming. But the intent is that we live it.

In fact, this is the only possibility: to persevere, to be. Anyone who grasps

positive impact on the city. People of other faiths will be welcome.

What makes him feel this will work?

In all his travels, he says, it's what he hears from the young people. They know what they think is wrong in society and they're eager to do something about it.



something of the terrible seriousness of his guilty existence in time must be seized by a horror that robs him of his breath and life. He can go on living truly, consciously and energetically only if he is freed from the power of evil and of the past. A fully human life, that is, a life that is fully conscious and responsible is only possible in faith.

This fruit, this power to live the liberated life comes by faith only because of its content and object. God in Christ knew what to do about the guilt of sin. He took it upon himself, and with it he took upon himself the whole of created reality in its total alienation. And he made it through. He came out clean of the corruption and darkness of sin. He brought reconciliation through the sacrifice of our substitute. And he brought to light eternal life, a life that is no longer lost and that cannot be lost. This is the great truth of Christ's resurrection. Because of it, we are no longer in our sins, but we stand in the new day. The past has been overcome and its burden removed. The future has been opened. We are empowered and we dare to live again. This is all that we can desire,

as long as God grants it – to live, to be, to enjoy the light of life.

In other words, everything hangs on Christ's resurrection. If it is no more than a fable, then faith has no power. And if faith is no longer a living, powerful faith, able to convert and regenerate, recreate and turn around our lives, then we remain imprisoned. For then we are still in our sins. That is all that can then be said of us. Humanity is then a hopeless case.

Once we have discovered the true seriousness of time and life through the gospel, we can no longer muster the courage to be without the resurrection. We cannot overcome our despair.

Only the gospel gives us the courage to fully see our situation as lost creatures, for it also gives us the trust that we are truly rescued from our lost state, and that therefore our situation is totally different from what we are able to gather on the basis of experience alone.

Gradually the joyful content of the gospel also becomes part of the experience of our faith. We begin to realize that we are saved!

Jim Wallis continued from page 2

This month in Columbus, Ohio, he and local pastors from various denominations will hold the first week-long revival in the city's largest megachurch. Along with preaching, they'll discuss how to commit to having a long-term

Even the children. A third-grade girl at one speech particularly touched him. "When you talked about that 'silent tsunami' that is killing so many children every day because of poverty – children like me ... I started to think to myself, 'If I'm a Christian, I better do something about that,'" she told Wallis afterward, according to

an account in his book.

A movement happens, he says, when people change their minds about what is acceptable in the world, and have faith that what needs to be done is possible.

June Lampman — The Christian Science Monitor

Creatures



Theo Igrisan

Spring is supposedly just around the corner. Yet, here I stand at one of the floor-to-ceiling windows that grace the back of my house and gaze out on a backyard recovering from a recent snowfall. This one dropped eight inches on top of the six that were already on the ground, and from the look of things, I'm beginning to think that Punxsutawney Phil might just be right in his prediction of six more weeks of winter.

But no, I'm sure that's not so.

It won't be long now and the beautiful flora and fauna, her crocuses and hyacinths, her lush oaks and abundant maples will spill forth in a spectacular array of brilliant colors.

The plumage here will rival that of any region with dazzling hues and sweet spring scents. The robins and cardinals will return with their welcome songs, the frogs in the creek behind us will serenade us with their mating calls, and the rabbits and woodchucks will once again forage in our backyard for the sweet clover that is so much a part of our lawn.

And how do I know it won't be long?

I know it without a shadow of a doubt (pun intended) because our very own spring messenger has arrived once again. For the past five years, our harbinger has announced spring's arrival like clockwork and in no uncertain terms.

In fact, it "announces" spring's impending arrival every morning around 5:30, when the entire house vibrates as if it sits in the path of an explosion's radiating concussion.

It's all due to the drumming of a woodpecker's beak on our metal chimney pipe.

The bed shakes, the windows rattle, my eardrums throb as he sits happily aloft, announcing to one and all, "Don't pay attention to all that snow, spring is almost here."

The first year it came, I couldn't quite tell what type of woodpecker it was. Gray back with spotted feathers and a red crown – I thought I had discovered a new species. The "Wake Me One More Time and I'll Shoot You" species of woodpecker.

In reality, it's a flicker, although it's part of the woodpecker

What is your banker really looking for when he comes to visit?

Maynard van der Galien

I once knew a farmer who was quite nervous when the Farm Credit man came to visit. He hurried about cleaning calf pens and bedding the calves with wood shavings so the pens would look clean and smell good.

The dairy cows were clipped neater and they were curry combed and brushed. The ally way behind the cows was hosed down and brushed clean. The outside of the milk bulk tank was given a good washing to make it look clean and shiny. The milkhose was scrubbed and tidied up.

Sound familiar? I'm sure most farmers want to impress their banker when he comes to the farm for a visit. Farmers are proud folks. There's nothing more satisfactory to look at in dairy, beef, or hog barns than to see the animals clean and in good condition. Visitors, especially your banker, won't be impressed with a dirty cobweb infested barn with junk everywhere.

And it's not only bankers who make farm calls. My farm insurance agent makes a farm call every March. We sit around the kitchen table and go over the policy. I'm sure he's vigilant and appreciates that he's insuring an up kept business.

As with most farms or businesses, it is not always the obvious that causes problems – equity, positive cash flow, good machinery and stock – are of the utmost importance. However, high production is often based on more subtle attributes – the human factor. The Farm Credit man or the banker isn't just looking at what meets the eye; he or she is looking at a whole range of things – including how you treat your spouse and children.

Of course, when a banker visits your home to talk business, the farm's finances will naturally be an important topic.

Brian Little, head of agriculture and agribusiness, RBC Royal Bank, tells what he looks for in a recent issue of the RBC Agriculture Business Review. Little has made about 1,000 visits to clients' farms over a 20-year period.

He says finance is not the only issue your banker is thinking about, or even the most important.

The farm itself

Little says in his years of farm calls, he'd always spend a few minutes looking around the yard. Is it well organized and neat? Is the equipment lined up in an orderly fashion? What kind of condition are the buildings in? Are the live-stock and crops clean, healthy and well maintained? Is the machinery and equipment in good shape?

family, as evidenced by its two-inch-long, titanium drill bit masquerading as a beak.

A master at tree clinging, it sticks to our smooth metal chimney pipe by what appears to be sheer force of will, and nothing will dislodge it.

The neighbors (who, I might add, are also awakened at this bright and shiny time of the morning) have been the recipients of quite a show in years past: Me in my nightgown, balancing in eight inches of snow while I pitch rocks at the bird, only to have it skirt around to the other side of the pipe to continue its jackhammer pace. My husband clinging to the 25-foot ladder we set up the night before, madly waving a white pillowcase in an attempt to scare it away.

This bird doesn't scare; it smirks. It also likes water, which we learned when my husband thought to bring out the "big gun," the giant supersoaker I am instructed to buy

The farm couple

Sitting at the kitchen table or in the farm office, you want to observe how the couple and family get along. Is the spouse involved? asked Little. Does the spouse appear to be welcome at the table when the banker visits? When the couple communicates – with the banker and each other – are they relaxed or stressed?

The farm's direction

Do all the farm's partners have a complete picture of the farm's finances: total assets, liabilities and equity? Does it appear that each of them is knowledgeable about the business? Are there signs of friction between the partners? Do they share information freely? Do they share the same goals for the farm? asked Little.

The farm as a family

Little says the small things can sometimes matter a great deal. He wants to know the last time they took a vacation as a family. How do they relax and have fun? Which community or industry do they participate in? he asks.

All of this paints a picture about the farm family and the farm business – a picture that complements the information available in the financial statements, says Little.

"You can have great equity, and terrific cash flow. But in my experience, if the family is under stress, the farm can't reach its full potential. In the same way, if there's a good plan in place, and everyone is pulling in the same direction, the farm can really thrive," says Little.

I'm sure most rural bankers try hard to understand farmers and farming. That can be difficult, I'm sure. Some years ago a banker I know was promoted to manager overseeing two small towns serving many farm clients – good farmers. He was somewhat embarrassed with the questions he asked me as we toured the countryside. What is the difference between a steer, a heifer and a bull? How do they make it a steer? When does a heifer become a cow? I had to chuckle to myself.

We had a neat little barnyard talk!

Maynard van der Galien will soon assist his veterinarian to castrate last summer's beef calf crop – when the weather is warmer. Fifty per cent of the calves are usually heifers, 50 per cent are bulls. The bulls are castrated and become steers. Steers are less aggressive than bulls. Your choice beef comes from steers. Heifer becomes a cow when she gives birth to first calf.



for him year after year, each one bigger than last year's model. We thought the blast of water would knock it off the chimney. Instead, it reveled in the shower.

I won't go into the mechanics of how it can withstand the force of beak-scrabbling, head-pounding drumming. Any bird who can drum for an hour, nonstop, on a metal pipe deserves my admiration. Once.

I often wonder how woodpeckers can live so long. Or is the bird in reality a descendant of the original, who has inherited this inane urge to seek bugs under the heat-resistant coating of our chimney?

I don't know. I do know that for the next three weeks, our natural alarm will drive us, and our neighbors, from our beds at 5:30 in the morning, and then suddenly, I'll wake one morning at a reasonable hour to find that the grass has greened, the lilacs are budding, my hostas are pushing through the earth right on time – and my alarm is nowhere to be found.

Quotations

A B C

Attention:

... From any still-life arrangement or model's pose, the artist could produce either a short study or a long one. Evidently, a given object took no particular amount of time to draw; instead the artist took the time, or didn't take it, at pleasure. And, similarly, things themselves possessed no fixed and intrinsic amount of interest; instead things were interesting as long as you had attention to give them.

Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*

Pain was greedy; it demanded all of her attention.

Toni Morrison, *Sula*

Appearances:

The door of Reverend Verringer's impressive manse is opened by an elderly female with a face like a pine plank; the Reverend is unmarried, and has need of an irreproachable housekeeper.

Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*

Adjusted:

I can't tell you how many times I've been asked whether I was a well-adjusted child, or if I found this very difficult. It's only now that people would ask such questions that presume so many things that I think shouldn't be taken for granted. First of all, who am I to say whether I was well adjusted? Secondly, what's so good about being well adjusted? Third, and most important, what does well adjusted mean?

Susan Sontag in *Original Minds* (Eleanor Watchtel, ed.)

What architecture they'd seen in Lerwick had been a mix of Scottish and Scandinavian styles, a sort of Ikea baronial.

Ian Rankin, *Black and Blue*

B

Boredom:

[Mr.] Shane nodded, mouth open, eyes blinking slowly, like a golfing man pretending to enjoy for courtesy's sake an impromptu lecture on cell mitosis or irrational numbers.

Michael Chabon, *The Final Solution*

The most stressful thing in the world is boredom.

Kevin Patterson, *Consumption*

Breakfast:

After being in jail for more than twenty years, Nelson Mandela was meeting with some government ministers when he was served breakfast. . .

"Because of my recent illness and my history of high blood pressure, I had been put on a strict low-cholesterol diet. That order had apparently not yet been conveyed to the clinic's kitchen, for the breakfast tray contained scrambled eggs, three rashers of bacon, and several pieces of buttered toast. I could not remember the last time I had tasted bacon and eggs, and I was ravenous. Just as I

was about to take a delicious forkful of egg, Major Marais said, 'No, Mandela, that is against the orders of your physician,' and he reached over to take the tray. I held it tightly, and said, 'Major, I am sorry. If this breakfast will kill me, then today I am prepared to die.'"

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*



Broken hearts:

There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.

Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Khostk, quoted by Niles Elliot Goldstein

C

Conversions to Christianity:

During the eighteenth century Indian society was struggling under a 'crushing load of unreason'. Child marriage, polygamy, sati, female infanticide, human sacrifices and the extreme rigidity of caste rules were some of the worst abuses of the time. Not to speak of inter-caste marriage or widow-re-marriage, even travels in foreign lands were regarded as preparing for a journey straight to hell. The tyranny of social convention, which in the past had driven many Hindus to become Muslims, encouraged conversions to Christianity as time went on.

An Outline History of the Indian People, H.R. Ghosal

Cross:



... One of the singled graves belongs to the woman who jumped out the window when the Ivans [Russian soldiers] were after her [for the purpose of rape]. It has a kind of crooked cross fashioned out of two pieces from a door panel – shiny white paint – and fastened together with wire. My throat tenses up. Why does the sight of a cross affect us the way it does, even if we can no longer call ourselves Christians? Memories of early childhood resurface: I see and hear Fräulein Dreyer, tears in her eyes, describing our savior's Passion in infinite detail to us seven-year-olds. For those of us in the West who were raised in the Christian tradition, every cross has a God appended to it, even if it's nothing but two splintered bits of door panel and a piece of wire.

Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, cf. 1945

Community:

(If you're from a city, it may surprise you that Jason had been able to find an artsy friend in Broken Head [Saskatchewan], but the fact is there's probably every kind of person in Broken Head that there is in any city, except there's only one or two of him or her, so that instead of belonging to some artificial community, she or he has no choice but to participate in a real one.)

xx Lee Gowan, *Make Believe Love*

D

I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Dying (living):

"You think I don't know what your life is like just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing."

"What's that?"

"Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world."

"Really? What have you got to show for it?"

"Show? To who? Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me."

"Lonely, ain't it?"

"Yes. But my lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely."

Toni Morrison, *Sula*

Dogs:

Your leaving will not be solved by your coming back. But one does not preclude the other. And maybe that is always what there is to fear, in everything that happens – what we choose to love will choose to forsake us. . .

I don't think any more that my life is about what has happened to me. It's about what I choose to believe. It's not what I can see, but what I think is out there.

And in the end, this end, here is what I believe.

The heart is a wild and fugitive creature.

The heart is a dog who comes home.

From Helen Humphreys, *Wild Dogs*

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

E

English spelling:

Interesting... Aoccdmng to a rescheacher at Cambridgde Uinervtisy, it doesn't mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny ipromoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamm mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh?

e-mail from Laura Strauss

Education:

Each second we live in a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was before and will never be again. And what do we teach our children in school? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the world there is no other child exactly like you. . . . And look at your body – what a wonder it is! Your legs, your arms, your cunning fingers, the way you move! You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you them harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must cherish one another. You must work – we all must work – to make this world worthy of its children.

Pablo Casals' memoirs

"... no one lowly or lacking in education was ever treated with disrespect *except* by the truly ignorant"

attributed (novelistically) to

Dr. Samuel Johnson

Beryl Bainbridge, *According to Queeney*

F



Farmers

The farmers around here are like the farmers I grew up with. Modest people, never boastful, tactful and courtly in their way. A farmer is dependent on too many things outside his control; it makes for modesty.

Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmines*

Food:

... I loved it [the food in the Amazon]. We would sit in the glow of a brazier just after sunset, sipping warm beer from brown bottles

Review

with no labels, as a man who had not shaved since the Battle of Hastings grilled what he claimed were tapir kabobs. These we had sizzling hot, drowned in a red pepper sauce that the devil had used to paint his Bentley.

With our eyes opened wide as if by laboratory grapples, sweat pouring from our bodies, and our stomachs screaming in despair, we would eat this personification of fire, guzzle warm beer, and try to deal with a bean dish for which the recipe began, "Take one bean and a thousand pounds of garlic. . . ."

Swaying and moaning, we would almost inevitably fall off our rickety wood chairs and collapse the tables upon which lay the food with which we did battle. But I loved this, I loved it even when we spent the night screaming agony as tiny German scientists in our stomachs repeatedly built and blew up the Hindenburg. I loved it because it was so difficult, and because things that are difficult are good.

Mark Helprin,
Memoir from Antproof Case

Filling out forms:

. . . She regarded the instructions on bureaucratic forms as straight lines. "Do you advocate the overthrow of the United States government by force or violence?" After some thought she wrote, "Force."

Annie Dillard,
An American Childhood

Faith:

It is hard to have faith, for that is what we require now. Knowing is easy, belief is difficult. Knowledge is tangible. Faith is reach, and some of us just can't do it.

Helen Humphreys, Wild Dogs

G

Grief:

Grief moves us like love. Grief is love, I suppose. Love as a backwards glance.

Helen Humphreys, The Lost Garden, p. 50

Grades (school marks):

I remember one of my teachers once telling me that a classmate of mine was quite a deep thinker, even though her grades were very good.

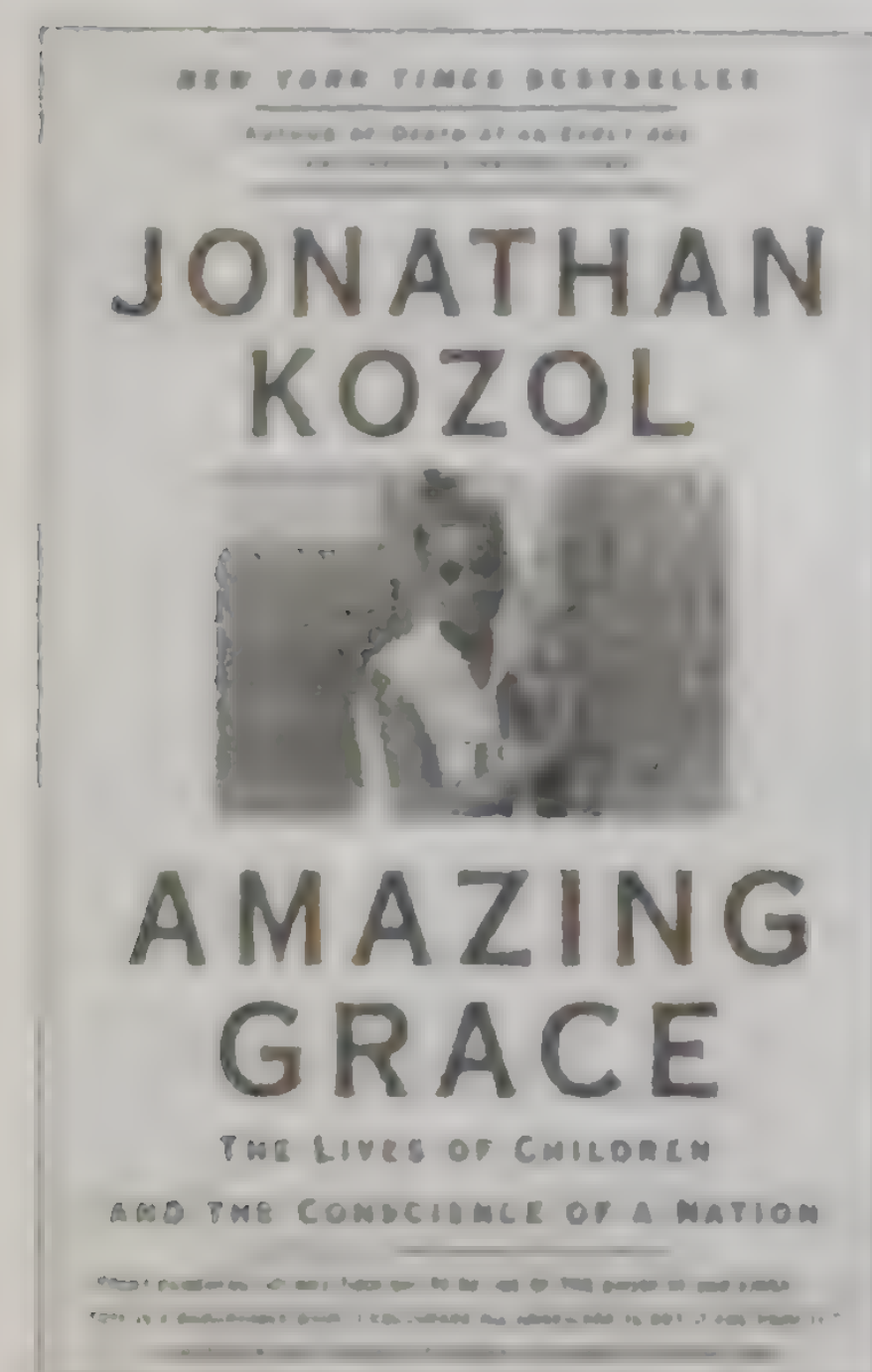
Amartya Sen in Original Minds (Eleanor Watchtel, ed.)

Guliani:

Like many in the neighborhood, he says that he has grown uncomfortable with New York City's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, but his criticism has to do with style more than politics. "The man turns flowers into stones," he says. "He is too dry and brittle, like the cold judiciary out of which he came. He has the mechanism of the law, but not its spirit. He tells the beggar, 'Don't sleep on the grass.' He should explain, 'This grass is sacred. Don't defile it. It is the banquet of our Creator.' It may be he does not understand the human factor. He is too absolute. There is something missing in his personality."

"What is it?" I ask.
"Love of the divine in man," he answers.

Jonathan Kozol,
Amazing Grace

SILLY, BUT SERIOUS
as well as heart-warming...

The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young.

Oscar Wilde

The older I am becoming, the more curious I am about the above quote. Lately, I catch myself looking disbelievingly in the mirror and have to admit time is not an illusion because it is written all over my face and makes itself felt in the creakiness of my bones.

Yet, in my heart, I feel much younger than my physical body seems to imply. For instance, I know I still would like to hike the grueling West Coast Trail one more time. But if I suggest anything along these lines to my spouse, he either protests vehemently or slowly lifts an eyebrow and suggests I may want to tackle the trail on my own? In any case, I realize, as we age, our brain will continue to nudge us to seek new experiences no matter how challenging they may be.

For this reason, the film *The Bucket List*, panned by the critics and loved by the public, was a feel good movie in spite of it being stereotypical and predictable. On the surface, the film is about Carter Chambers, a pleasant, hard working automobile mechanic and family man and Edward Cole a cranky corporate billionaire who is alienated from family members. They meet because they are forced to share a hospital room and strike up a friendship. When they are both told they have a terminal illness, they develop a "bucket list" of things they still want to do before they die. Under the objections of Carter's wife, they check themselves out of the hospital and travel to exotic places to make the list come true.

In reality, however, the film is a story about two men who are stuck in their lives and how they challenge each other to grow. As Carter and Edward discuss the possibility of experiencing some of the items on the bucket list, Carter recalls walking down a familiar street and thinking "I cannot remember walking down this street without holding her (his wife's) hand." In his commitment

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



and dedication to his family he not only gave up his career goals but he also lost a part of himself that made him a stranger to his family. Edward, on the other hand, in his drive to be financially successful, has built such a hard shell around himself, he rides roughshod over the people he loves, alienating them as a result.

And so, these two men, as they embark upon experiencing exotic places and daredevil thrills, form a friendship that allows them to share the good and bad in each other's lives. And, like most friendships in which people care about one another, both of them also overstep the boundaries of their relationship. Unfortunately, this leads to an unhappy end to their trip. At the same time, this turn of events also challenges them to eventually face themselves in a way that helps them make the choices needed to become unstuck and finish their lives in a better way.

The film was a good example of how we do not grow in isolation but through being in relationships with people who are not afraid to challenge us to become the persons we may want to be. Plus, I see no tragedy in wanting to have some fun together . . . it lightens the soul no matter how old we are and gives us hope for the future.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



H

Happiness:

. . . Happiness is wild and arbitrary, but it's not sudden.
Anne Michaels, Fugitive Pieces

Hubris:

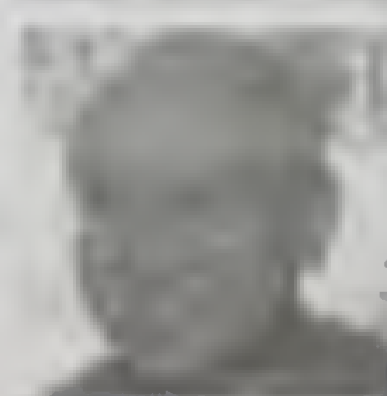
Deep fundamental change breaks like surf upon children, and it is change that injures us when we become wealthy, not some Calvinist idea that riches corrupt the flesh and soul. Poverty remains the most potent toxin for humans but the next most potent poison is confusion. When we are confused about what and how much we should eat, about how much assistance to receive from our machines, about how much attention to pay to our parents and our aunts and uncles, and, God help us, our children, we become ill, we sicken ourselves. We stop moving and we stop attending to the necessary rituals. We become fat and hubristic, and we lost confidence in our own capacity.

Kevin Patterson, Consumption

Hygiene:

It was Sister Hildegard's belief that good penmanship was the defining key to success in life. That and hygiene – but though the hygiene just had to be adequate, the writing had to be exquisite.

Louise Erdrich, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse



Curt Gesch is a neo-Luddite, neo-Calvinist, and – as far as he can tell – a neo-natal human being. His telephone number is (250) 846-9511.

Grace:

The children to the left side of the altar sing a fast, hand-clapping song, "All Things Come of Thee," and then surprise the congregation by walking down into the aisles, where they hug and kiss their mothers and grandmothers, after which they sing a slower and more tender song: "I Love You with the Love of the Lord."

After asking one of the poorest congregations in America "to make offerings for those less fortunate than we," and leaving time for the offering plate to pass across the room, Reverend Groover returns to the altar and asks another woman, "Sister Eunice Turtle," to stand up, and then a number of the other senior mothers of the church. Each is given a flower and fruit basket. One of the women, wearing a white dress and white hat with a black ribbon, weeps as she receives her gift.

"We thank you, O Lord, for the gift of motherhood," the pastor says. "We pray you to have mercy for all mothers, even those who may be out there walking in the streets." His voice is tender and not patronizing. "And show mercy, Lord, to the principalities and powers of our city, that they too may know Thy grace and be transformed."

Jonathan Kozol, Amazing Grace

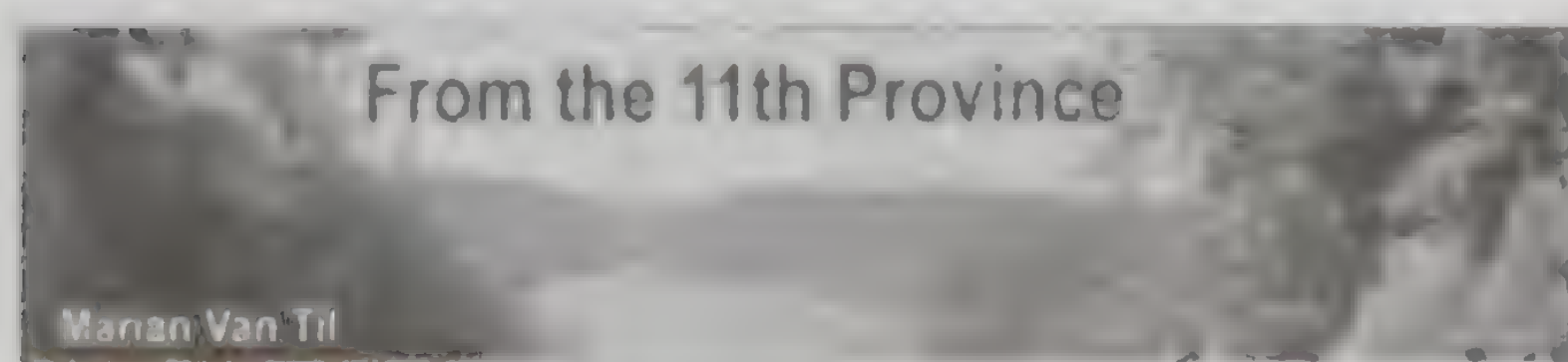
Gossip:

In the Jerusalem Talmud it states: "The gossip stands in Syria and kills in Rome."

Sir Martin Gilbert,

Dearest Auntie Fori: The Story of the Jewish People

Reflections



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

The weather is chilly here in the Niagara Peninsula on the U.S. side, and there are still six or eight inches of snow in our backyard and five-foot piles at the end of our driveway. But as I write, the sun is as bright as it can possibly be in mid-March at -79 degrees longitude and 43.2 degrees latitude.

Squirrels are jumping about, jostling each other for the sunflower seeds and other tasty bits that have fallen from the bird feeder. The birds for whom the seeds are really intended are rapily shelling those seeds in their built-in bird-gratitude to God their Maker and Provider. Once again two of our cats are lying in the sunshine that is streaming into the windows behind me. Neither is napping. Each is intently watching the squirrels, juncos, cardinals, blue jays, mourning doves, house finches, black-capped chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches and various kinds of sparrows that alternate or share attendance at the feeder 10 feet outside the window glass.

Bird song and bullies

It's fascinating to watch which species will feed together and which ones steer clear of each other. And which ones stop to chirp or sing between mouthfuls. Larger size isn't always the factor that gets a particular creature a place at the feeder. A lone black squirrel is chased away, and quickly, by its grey- and brown-colored relatives. The black is a melanistic phase of the Eastern grey squirrel, and in this area is very much a minority. The black ones seem to be outcasts, like litter runts. But I like them. I get annoyed when their pushier, more numerous cousins aggressively run them out of town, town being *my* yard. The greys quite clearly have a claim on the territory, oblivious to its human owners. Alas, no amount of my sermonizing to them about "doing unto others as they would like to be done to" is going to help. They, too, praise God in their way – for he created them and they are his – but they unconsciously feel, as all Creation feels, the effects of *our* Fall into sin. Of course they have no moral knowledge of it and, thus, no responsibility for their behavior.

'Good dog!' 'Bad cat!'

Nevertheless, mammal pets can be taught by their owners what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Those pets then clearly know when they are doing something wrong. Our cat Digory suffers from what can only be described as jealousy of several of his feline house mates. (He's our only Canadian-born cat. I'll leave it to you to decide if he's suffering an inferiority complex in the presence of five, overwhelming "American" cat-mates!) He doesn't dare lash out with tooth or claw at my husband or me. But he'll "pay back" another cat for attention it gets from us, attention he wants. I am not anthropomorphizing (attributing human characteristics to animals). We've seen it over and over. A couple of times he has paid *us* back, by urinating outside the litter box. As long as he himself is lavished with attention, he's content.

Cats supposedly have mental abilities approximately like those of pre-verbal children. That seems about right. Like an out-of-sorts toddler Digory will take a paw-swing at Roo or Dancer when one of them walks by; or he will all-out lunge: he picks fights when he's feeling neglected. He entirely understands that we insist that is a "bad" thing. In fact, he will often look around first to see if Ed or I are watching and will proceed if he thinks we're not. If he's caught, he'll sink to the floor, lower his head and wait for me to reprimand him and pull him away from the cat he's sparring with. Like those aggressive squirrels, Digory doesn't know moral/spiritual culpability that a toddler can already begin to understand. He is, after all, an animal, not a human being made in God's image. However, this phenomenon is just one of many pieces of evidence that God created each individual animal (or at least mammals) with distinct personalities and emotions; and smarter than we think.

Creation, Fall, Redemption: Old song, new tune

If nothing else, that astonishing individual distinctness should make us value animals far more than a lot of us do. It has immense implications for our animal farming and husbandry practices. Or at least, it should have. And we shouldn't sneer at anyone who for conscience sake chooses to be a vegetarian.

Blood shed for us

In their exegeting of the Creation story some Christian churches have emphasized (rightly, in my view) that after Adam and Eve sinned and were hiding from God, and God sought them out in the Garden, he replaced their inadequate covering of leaves with animals skins – the first obvious external effect of the Fall: animals, which God had created to be Adam's friends – which God had brought to Adam to name (no small thing the biblical economy) – were for the first time slaughtered on human behalf (it is logically presumed). Such slaughter would need to continue for thousands of years: blood was required, sacrifices had to be made; and then the ultimate slaughtered Lamb spilt his blood so that we can get off free, and walk with God once more.

Thus began, too, the eating of animals in addition to the green plants God had given sinless Adam and Eve to eat. God had said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." And it was so" (Gen. 1:29-30).

Indispensable truth

Evolutionary biologists thinks that's nuts, that and the rest of the biblical Creation story. And, frankly, so do a lot of scientists who are Christians. They insist "the Bible is not a science textbook." And indeed, it is not. It is *truth*, however, start to finish; God's truth set down in story, poetry, prose, history, proverbs, apocalypse and various other forms of literature by human beings in whom God's Spirit was uniquely moving.

If we believe that God is our Creator as well as Redeemer – as indeed we must, since his redeeming us is not possible without his having created us, and neither would God be the God he claims to be, nor any god at all – then we surely must believe the truth of the biblical Creation account as God has revealed it to us. All or nothing: God's insistence that he spoke the universe into being; that Adam and Eve were our first parents; that they sinned, separating themselves from God and the perfect world he made for them and would therefore confront another horribly new thing: death; and that their disobedience sent immediate and thereafter indelible shockwaves throughout the originally good Creation and down the corridors of time and the generations of the human race, ending in our condemnation and death. But one day, one glorious day, the Seed of the woman would crush the Serpent's head!

Do we really fathom to what extent the Fall has distorted the *good* Creation as God made it? Oh, we're aware of the nastiness of sin as revealed in human behavior, self-obsession and modern forms of idolatry. But what about the profound effects on Creation, which apparently was massively re-ordered (dis-ordered) as a result of the Fall?

On the other hand, the marvel is that, despite how we've twisted everything, our gracious God has allowed his Creation, and we in it, to retain immense richness and beauty and resources, for his glory and our enjoyment and care. He allows us the intelligence and will to uncover and discover, generation after generation, "new" things that he placed in his good Creation.

A creational amazement

That brings me to one of those amazing discoveries – a recent one, in the scheme of things – of which I am the grateful recipient. After spending 45 of my 55 years wearing glasses, I need them no longer. I've been extremely nearsighted most of my life and recently thought that I needed new glasses again. So I was quite surprised to learn, at my relatively tender age, that I had cataracts. There would be no escaping the need for surgery within a year or two, so I decided to do it sooner rather than later. I had the surgeries last month: my left eye one week and my right eye the next week.

When a cataract is removed it results in the removal of the eye's natural lens. That clouded lens is replaced with an artificial, intra-ocular one. In my case, I chose special lenses that are "accommodating"; that is, they move in the eye with one's eye muscles to provide the largest range of vision possible with artificial lenses. It takes some time for the eye (and brain) to adjust to, as one's mostly disused eye muscles need to get back in shape. My distance vision still needs some improving but it's wonderful not to have to wear either reading glasses, "organ/piano" glasses or any other kind.

The development of such lenses and all the medical technology to go with them is one of those creational amazements. The surgery itself takes a mere 10-minutes under mild sedation. It wasn't long ago when cataracts still routinely blinded people. And when I think of what I learned about 18th century eye-treatment techniques while researching my Handel biography, I shudder. Handel went blind at age 66, but not from cataracts. However, he endured the cataract procedure called "couching," in which the supposed cataract was pushed away from the center of the eye; with an unsterilized needle, without anesthetic. Bach (born a few weeks later than Handel in the same year) truly did have cataracts, so he too endured this procedure. A resulting body-wide infection killed him.

Resurrection reality

Now that I've made *you* shudder along with me, we can all be thankful that in terms of medical technology (not to mention hot water and other indoor plumbing) we're living in the modern age in which God has put us. (If you need cataract surgery but are reluctant: just do it! If my own experience can help in any way, write or email me.)

There's a new picture of me accompanying this column, sans glasses (Bert Witvoet led the way, last issue, in the "new columnist pictures" category). However, in the previous photo of me here I wasn't wearing glasses, either. That wasn't so much vanity as the knowledge that having my picture taken while wearing glasses almost always produced unacceptable glare and unhappy results.

All that being said, artificial lenses or even entire eyes some day will never rival the human eye as God created it. I have relearned my school lessons about how the eye works. It is just one of countless aspects of our bodies which should cause us to exult: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" We are able to say that while still living on this sin-bound earth because, as Harry the editor reminded us in the Easter issue, the Resurrection is already our "present reality." And so we can sing with Luther's Easter hymn:

*It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended.
The victory remained with life; the reign of death was ended.
Holy Scripture plainly says his death has swallowed up our death;
its sting is lost forever.
Alleluia!*

(CHRIST LAG IN TODESBANDEN, Ps. Hymnal #398)



Marian Van Til was former editor of Christian Courier. She can be contacted by email at mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: wordpowerpublishing.com

Advertising



Riding the rails ... continued from p. 6

It was morning and the coffee cart was approaching.

Drinking coffee on a train isn't like drinking your coffee at home. The cups are filled to the brim and the coffee is hot! One must be awfully careful not to spill. This advice also applies when using the bathroom facilities.

The train has a habit of jerking at the most inopportune moments.

In the meantime the train attendant had come by to collect the blankets and the cushions. We had chosen to sit on the last seat of the train car to be able to keep our suitcases directly behind us. My husband, for want of something to do, gave the attendant a hand folding the blankets. A job he gets sometimes harnessed with at home too. The man promptly promised him a reduction on his next train ticket. We found the train attendants very friendly and humorous.

Arriving at the Moncton train station and meeting my sister and her husband was the highlight of our trip. During the five days that we were there we did a lot of talking. It was good to talk about our mother, who had gone to be with the Lord only four years ago, at the age of one hundred. And we reflected on and were surprised that we ourselves now were treading the path that she had trod for twenty years alone.

On our last day there, my brother-in-law mentioned too that this might be the last time that we would see each other here on this earth. But he was eager to speak too of the peace that we have in Jesus Christ. Aware that our sojourning on earth may not be significant anymore, we shared the hope in Jesus of meeting again at our final destination.

The following day in the late afternoon we boarded

the train to go home. Again it was dark when traveling through the province of Quebec.

I found myself in a melancholy mood that night. I'm sure this was partly due to the good byes we had said at the station. But in addition, the sad sound of the train whistle that was activated at regular intervals also brought back memories of my very first train trip into Canada in 1950, and of a particular incident.

After a nine-day long boat trip from the Netherlands accompanied by my parents and a brother, I had traveled these same rails from Halifax to Montreal. My sister had married and gone to Canada in 1946. After we landed in Halifax we had phoned her to let her know that our train would stop early the next morning at the Moncton station for a half an hour. As we rolled into the station at 6:00 a.m. we saw my sister and her husband and their two little ones standing on the station platform in the chill of that very early morning. What a reunion it was after a four-year separation! Only, it was way too brief! I can only imagine how my parents felt. Afterwards the train had taken us further and further away from them into that big, then foreign country.

The train's repeatedly mournful wailing in the night now seemed to still have the power to bring back that memory and evoke the same feelings of sadness in my heart as it had then. I found that there was even now still grief in my heart because of the fact that my only sister and I had to live almost our entire life a thousand miles apart.

However ... every now and then I would be lifted out of my dispirited mood. The encouragement came from the view of a beautifully lit up cross on the steeple of a prominent Catholic Church of which there are so many in the province of Quebec. It also reminded me of the last view of our brother-in-law. How he, sitting on his walker when saying our good byes at the station, already separated from us by the train windows, repeatedly had pointed his folded hands upward.

After a long sleepless night it was pure relief to see

the contours of the earth once more become visible. It was then that I became aware of a beautiful sunrise from the window of the train. First I saw little wisps of white cloud above the horizon color a delicate pink and slowly the whole sky turned pink. I watched "in awesome wonder" until I was forced to look away. A new day was breaking! And my soul again sang "My God, how great Thou art ..." (Psalm Hymn:483)

Soon after we found ourselves once again at the station in Montreal.

It was early morning and everyone was rushing to work. It was quite a sight, watching what seemed like a never-ending flow of commuters stream through the station. Most of them were heading for the main doors and poured out into the streets of Montreal to go to their respective places of work.

While waiting there once more for our connection, we met a friendly middle-aged man who started a conversation. He was alone and had to travel all the way to Vancouver. He offered to watch our suitcases to give us a chance to get ourselves a sandwich and to use the restrooms. We had observed him earlier on the train assisting a lady who was traveling alone so we had no trouble with that. He emitted a strong sense of trust. Our friendly stranger also told us that the beautiful sculpted artwork we admired on the opposite walls of that grand station depicted word for word our national anthem.

The last stretch home seemed short and changed to familiar cornfields and soya beans again. Soon fall would come. Here and there appeared already a hint of colour.

A friend picked us up at the station. After our relaxed train ride we found the traffic on the 401 overwhelming on our short trip home.

Back in my own bed at night I thanked the Lord for a safe return home and for the many tokens of his presence on our trip. If our health allows us to travel again, it will not be on the road, nor in the sky, but again on rails.

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On: Aug. 25/2008

Classifieds

Birthdays		Anniversaries		
<p>With thanksgiving to God we are pleased to announce that on April 21, 2008</p> <p>Wilhelmina Van Gent</p> <p>hopes to celebrate 100 years of life, goodness and blessings, which the Lord has bestowed on her</p> <p><i>Great is your faithfulness</i></p> <p>You are welcome to join us for an Open House, the Lord willing on Monday, April 21, 2008 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. at Harmony Hall, Holland Christian Homes 7900 McLaughlin Road South, Brampton Ont</p> <p><i>Best wishes only</i></p> <p>Congratulations Mom, Oma and Great-oma With love and best wishes from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren</p> <p>Home address: Faith Manor 130-7900 McLaughlin Rd S Brampton ON L6Y 5A7</p> <p><i>She is still reading every CC publication with the help of a visual aid (short circuit TV) which enlarges up to 40 times</i></p>	<p><i>Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good His lovingkindness continues forever</i></p> <p>We are thankful to God for his faithfulness to our mom and Beppe and great-grandmother</p> <p>Minnie Westerhuis</p> <p>as she celebrates her 90th birthday D.V Friday, April 4th in Shalom Manor where she resides</p> <p>Happy Birthday mom, you have been a blessing to us all.</p> <p>Love your children Jane & Louie Regnerus Julie & Ben Winter Joanne & Simon Heeg Shirley Westerhuis Grandchildren & great-grandchildren</p> <p>Corresponding address Minnie Westerhuis c/o Shalom Manor 12 Bartlett Ave. Grimsby ON L3M 4N5</p>	<p>With thankfulness to the Lord we announce the 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY on April 10, 2008 of our parents and grandparents</p> <p>FRANK AND TENA KAMSTRA</p> <p>Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless and keep you both in health and happiness</p> <p>With love from your children: Nelly & John Kiezebrink Andrew & Alma Kamstra Mildred & Hank Veenstra Nancy & Randy Robb Henry Kamstra & Sarah Martin And all 15 Grandchildren</p> <p>We invite you to celebrate with us at an Open House Saturday April 12, 2008 From 2:00 – 4:00 pm At Tollendale Village 274 Hurst Drive, Barrie, Ontario</p> <p>Home address: Apt. 304-270 Hurst Dr Barrie ON L4N 0Z3</p>	<p>1958 April 9 2008</p> <p><i>Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father</i></p> <p>We give thanks to God as we celebrate (D.V.) the 50th Wedding Anniversary of</p>  <p>HANK AND HELEN KLOK -nee DeWolde</p> <p>Thank you Dad and Mom, Opa and Oma, for the blessings and love of God you have passed on to us</p> <p>With love from your children: Henry & Julie Klok Richard & Margaret Klok Corry & John Vanderwekken Ron & Pauline Klok Harvey Klok Brad Klok & friend Launa and their families.</p> <p>Address: 14 Signature Crt, Taber AB T1G 2C8</p>	
 		<p>With praise to our heavenly Father, we celebrate the 55th Wedding Anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents</p> <p>ORVAL AND ANN OKKEMA (nee DeJong)</p> <p>on April 22, 2008</p> <p>We thank God for Mom and Dad's love for each other and for all of us. And it is our prayer that God will grant them joy together with all of us as he continues to surround them with his loving care.</p> <p>Love and congratulations from all of us, Mark & Sue Damon-Okkema, of <i>Waterloo</i> Doran, Brynn, Arend Tilda & Ed Bosman, of <i>Moorefield</i> Kevin & Angela, Kara Julianne, Semyra, Josiah Steven & Alyssa Arlene & Dave, Joshua Ray Okkema, of <i>Guelph</i></p> <p>Correspondence: Orval & Ann Okkema Apt 1101 - 685 Woolwich St Guelph ON N1H 8M6</p>	<p>1958 ~ Toronto St. George, ON ~ 2008</p> <p>EUGENE AND NELLIE KRUYSSSE (De Haan)</p> <p>Hope to celebrate a Half century of marriage on Saturday April 26, 2008 D.V.</p> <p>You are invited to join their children and grandchildren at a Reception at their residence 48 Edward Avenue, St. George, Ontario From 2:00 to 4.00 p.m.</p> <p>Richard David & Cathy - Zachary, Alyssa Carol & James Ogle - Rachel, Sara, David Sandra Potvin - Joseph, Edward</p> <p>PO Box 956, St George ON N0E 1N0 e-mail: eugenel@rogers.com Phone: (519) 448-4641</p> 	
<p>Joy, what is it? Joy can be expressed and felt in a multitude of ways. This family picture represents joy. For our mother, Riemke Hiemstra-Huisman, joy was attained through her faith and her family.</p> <p>Dad and mom have a wonderful comradeship even after nearly 58 years together. They realize how blessed they are to spend the "Golden Years" together. (...and may you live to see your children's children, and peace upon Israel. Ps 128:6)</p> <p>John Hiemstra and Riemke left Holland for Canada in June 1950, just two weeks after being married. Mom followed the love of her life and began a new life in a country, far away from a loving relationship with her parents.</p> <p>God has blessed them in 58 years with 8 daughters and sons-in-law, 36 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Mom's definition of joy is faith and family.</p> <p>Sundays would find us in church filling up a pew. All of us had designated areas to sit. I often sat beside mom. In the summer, during the afternoon service the church would begin to feel musty and warm. My small cheek would rest against the coolness of mom's arm and I would feel myself nod off. What comfort and joy. Mom had her small flock around her and it was a time that we all had to be quiet for an hour which I am sure, also gave mom joy.</p>		<p>These Sunday services were joys that we took for granted but were very real and important to mom.</p> <p>I realized the importance of this when mom mentioned it a few years ago. She said that she had read an article where the children had asked their mother what her 80th birthday wish was. The woman had replied, "... that all my children would come to church with me and sit in the church pew just as they had when they were little." At that time, Mom did not say that this was her wish but I could read between the lines and knew it would be another joy for mom.</p> <p>May 1, 2007 was Mom's 80th birthday. Arrangements were made for all the girls from British Columbia, Alberta, and Washington USA to meet in Kamloops, B.C. to celebrate. Some had not been together for years so there was lots of catching up to do with eight noisy girls back in one house with their parents. What joy.</p> <p>Sunday morning found us all in church. Two pews were needed for all with the youngest aged two and the eldest 83. I did not sit beside mom on this special Sunday but that was alright. I felt the joy and grace from my position beside my husband. The pastor introduced the family and my husband stood and explained the special occasion. Looking down the pew and seeing the joy on mom's face made the weekend completely worthwhile. What joy!</p>	<p>Obituary</p> <p>SIDNEY ADEMA</p> <p>December 31, 1921 – March 12, 2008</p> <p><i>The Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation.</i> Psalm 118:14</p> <p>Sidney Adema passed away peacefully at Holland Christian Homes and entered into eternal life with his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Dear husband of Anna Steursma - Adema for 62 years</p> <p>Loving father of: John & Gerdie Cor & Betty Lucy & Ken Peter & Anne Yetty & John Bert & Ruth Jake & Coby Sidney & Jane Martin & Tracy</p> <p>Loving Opa of 46 grandchildren and 36 great-grandchildren</p> <p>Celebration of life Service at Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, on Monday, March 17. In memory contributions may be sent to Georgetown Christian School.</p> <p>Correspondence address: Anna Adema H109-7900 McLaughlin Road S, Brampton ON L6V 5A7</p>	<p>For Rent</p> <p>SHARED ACCOMODATION: Niagara Falls, one or two bedrooms on main floor or basement bedroom. Parking, laundry. 500+ utilities. Female student or young professional. Close to Brock U and Niagara College, bus route & QEW. Non Smoking, no pets. Available immediately. Call 905 353 1958</p> <p>Vacation</p> <p>Holiday in Holland</p> <p>Beautiful self-contained cottage in Friesland www.chestnutlane.nl</p>  <p>Eco-friendly Eastern Ontario Cottage for Rent:</p> <p>This three bedroom solar-powered and winterized cottage sits on beautiful Lower Beverley Lake. For more information checkout http://freewebs.com/unpluggedbay or call 905-304-8823 to arrange rental times</p>
<p>ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF PRAISE Rehoboth United Reformed Church, Hamilton April 12 7:30 p.m.</p> <p>4 male choirs participating: Ambassadors; The Choraliers; Collegium Musicum and The Crusaders.</p> <p>For more information, see the Calendar of Events, p. 23</p>				

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an alternative program for Edmonton Public Schools, has possible openings for 2 Principal positions in their K-9 campus or high school campus.

For more information contact Peter Buisman at 780-476-6281
peterbuisman@edmchristian.net

School website:

www.edmchristian.net



WOODLAND CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

invites applications for a teaching position for the 2008-2009 school year. Teachers who are qualified to teach in the following areas are encouraged to apply:

Mathematics

French

Please address inquiries to John VanPelt, Principal at principal@woodland.on.ca.

Information about Woodland Christian High School is available on our website at www.woodland.on.ca



is seeking qualified applicants for a possible opening for a one year term position at the

intermediate level

commencing in September 2008. If you love Christ and his children, are a qualified teacher and are interested in being part of a dynamic team of educators we look forward to hearing from you. Please send your resume and a statement of faith to:

Paul Triemstra, Principal
Ottawa Christian School
2191 Benjamin Ave.
Ottawa Ontario K2A 1P6

Tel: (613) 722-5836
Fax: (613) 722-1793
Email: paul@ocschool.org
Website: www.ocschool.org



SHALOM MANOR AND GARDENS,

a Christian long-term care home and retirement centre, is currently seeking applications for the positions of

- a) RNs and RPNs and,
- b) a full-time, RPN Care Coordinator, (one year maternity leave), for our retirement assisted-living apartments.

If you are interested in working in a Christian setting, caring for elderly Dutch-Canadian residents, we invite you to submit your resume to the:

Director of Care, Shalom Manor and Gardens
12 Bartlett Ave
Grimsby ON L3M 4N5

Fax (905)945-1211

Email: info@shalommanor.ca



SHALOM MANOR and GARDENS

a Christian long term care and retirement community serving Dutch-Canadian seniors in Grimsby, requires a

MANAGER OF RECREATION AND VOLUNTEER SERVICES

(approximately one (1) year)

Reporting to the CEO, you will be responsible for the administration, organization and management of activation, recreation, leisure services and volunteer coordination; accountable for financial viability; planning and decision making at the senior management team level; managing human and material resources; policy and procedure development; continuing education and training of program staff; Continuous Quality Improvement and Risk Management.

Qualifications Required: degree in Gerontology, and/or diploma in Recreation and Leisure studies from a recognized university or community college; must have supervisory experience that includes budget and activity planning, scheduling, implementing and developing recreational programs and coordinating volunteers in a long term care/retirement home setting; possess good communication, leadership, organizational and interpersonal skills.

Please forward a detailed resume in writing by fax, mail or e-mail no later than 4:00 p.m. Thursday, April 3, 2008 to:

Chris Rynberk, CEO
12 Bartlett Ave, Grimsby ON L3M 4N5
Fax: 905-945-1211 Email: info@shalommanor.ca

Shalom Manor appreciates all responses. However, only applicants chosen for an interview will be contacted.



REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

LABORATORY INSTRUCTOR IN THE SCIENCES

Redeemer University College seeks applications to fill a full-time, nine-month laboratory instructor position in the Sciences, to run from August 1, 2008 to April 30, 2009. The successful applicant will be responsible for teaching first-year labs in Biology, Environmental Science, and Chemistry. In addition, the successful applicant will: supervise student workers, maintain chemical inventory and MSDS records, implement safety guidelines, maintain labs and lab equipment, and assist with undergraduate student research projects. We are seeking someone with a Masters Degree in Biology, Environmental Science, or Chemistry, who is familiar with the range of instrumentation used in these fields and who is familiar with a variety of laboratory techniques.

As a liberal arts and science undergraduate university rooted in the Reformed tradition of Christianity, we seek candidates who are committed to instructing from this perspective. Interested applicants should submit a curriculum vitae, two letters of reference and a short statement on how their own faith commitment fits the mission of Redeemer University College. The closing date for applications is April 30, 2008 or until the position is filled.

Please send applications to:

Dr. Jacob P. Ellens, Vice President, Academic
Redeemer University College
777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario L9K 1J4 Canada
jellens@redeemer.ca

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Part-time Pastor to the Seniors

The position calls for someone with a caring heart and a love for seniors. The primary responsibility of this new staff member will be pastoral visitation but, if desired, opportunities to preach are also available. A full job description is available upon request from our Administrative Assistant, Tina Van Dyk, at office@burlingtoncra.ca. Applications and/or resumes can be forwarded by April 22 to Jack Herrewynen, Council Secretary, at the same address.



Worldwide Christian Schools

invites applications for:

- **Development Director, Eastern Canada**
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- **Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper**
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Worldwide Christian Schools (WWCS) is a Christian organization providing hope to children in developing countries through Christ-centred education.

Send cover letter and resume to:

Worldwide Christian Schools
70 Lancing Drive, Hamilton ON L8W 3A1
866-360-4274 canada@wwcs.org

Full job description available upon request.

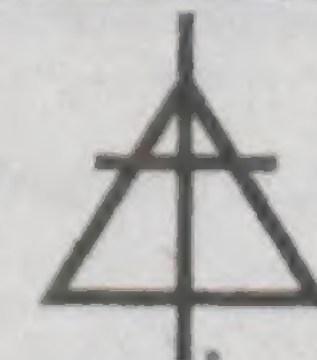
The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is seeking a new

Director of Faith Alive Christian Resources

to provide strategic planning and administrative oversight. Faith Alive is the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church; the resource provider of the Reformed Church in America, and a supplier of resources for various other denominations.

Successful candidates will have strong business experience, experience in developing new markets, adaptability, strong administrative skills, a personal commitment to the Reformed Christian faith, and a member of the Christian Reformed Church (or willing to become a member).

A complete job description is available on our web site at www.crcna.org under Jobs/Careers. To apply send cover letter and resume to fasearch@crcna.org no later than May 30, 2008.



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For more information regarding investment with Elim Village, contact **Terry-Lynn Dryfhout** at tld@elimvillage.com or call 778.996.7755. Visit our website at www.ElimVillage.com



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Institute for Christian Studies
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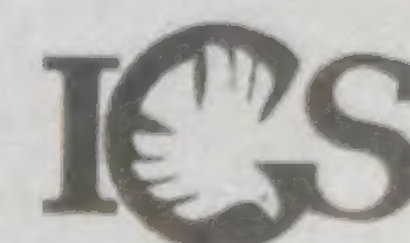
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inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"
1 Thessalonians 1:3



Friendship Day

in Burlington sponsored by

The Canada Netherlands Friendship Association.
May 3 - flag raising ceremony at Burlington City Hall at 12 noon.

May 5 - Monday the celebration will continue at the beautiful Royal Botanical Gardens. Doors open at 6 p.m. program starts at 7 p.m. The 'Tops' a Dubbelmannenkwartet from Grijpskerk/Hoogkerk and the 48th Highlanders of Holland-Pipes and Drums of Apeldoorn will be part of the evening celebration. The event is free.

For more information visit www.cnfa.ca or contact
Jack Vander Laan 905 332 7000
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fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above

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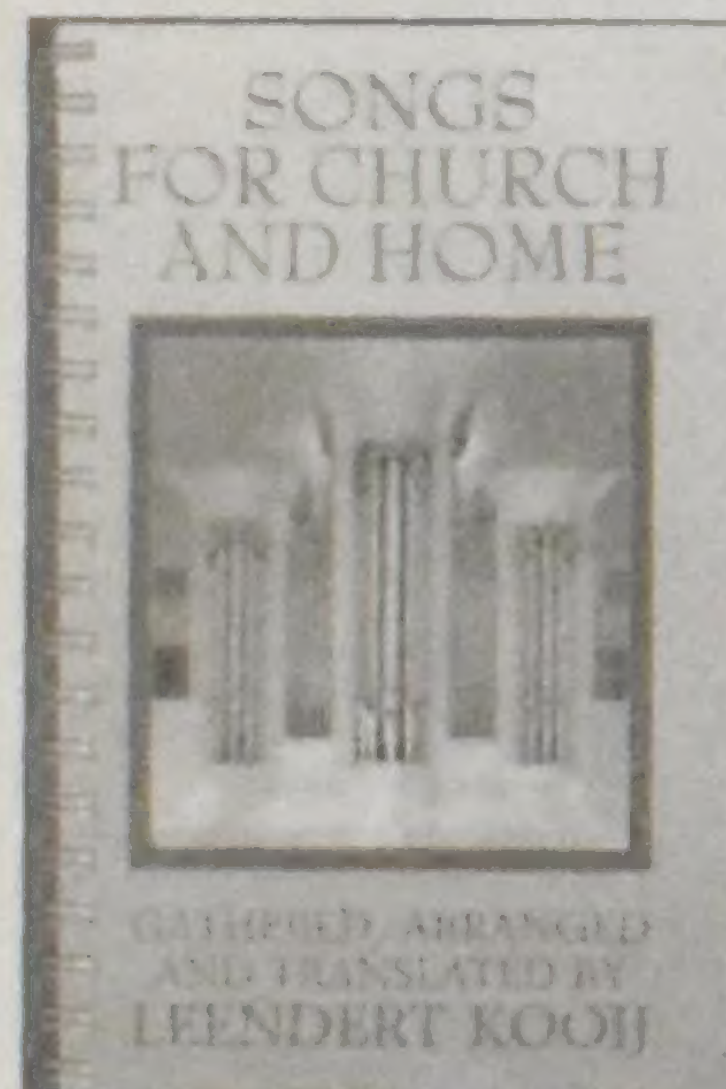
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

- April 12** Annual Festival of Praise – Rehoboth United Reformed Church opposite HDCH, **Hamilton** 7:30 p.m. – 4 male choirs participating: Ambassadors; The Choraliers; Collegium Musicum and The Crusaders. For info or tickets: vaneekae@sympatico.ca or p-b.degroot@sympatico.ca or go www.schuurman.ca/ambassadors.htm Tickets \$12 and \$10 for seniors.
- April 13** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry R. DeBolster will be preaching.
- April 19, 20** Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. Celebrations and special events will be held on Saturday April 19 at 7 p.m. and Sunday April 20 during the 10 a.m. service.
- April 26** **Sarnia** Ontario "Men in Praise Festival" at 7 pm at the Temple Baptist Church. For more info email dmeeder@cogeco.ca See ad below.
- May 2** Noon-hour Organ Recital featuring Stephanie Burgoyne (Music Director, St. Jude's Anglican Church) and William Vandertuin (solo and organ four hands) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**, 12:15 pm. (wvan@rogers.com)
- May 2** Noon-hour Organ Recital featuring Dr. Christiaan Teeuwsen (Music Director at MacNab St. Presbyterian Church, Hamilton) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, Brantford, 12:15 pm. (wvan@rogers.com)
- May 2-4** Marriage encounter weekend in **London, ON**. For more information or to register on-line, go to www.reformedme.org or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org
- May 3, 5** Friendship day, in **Burlington** sponsored by The Canada Netherlands Friendship Association. For more information visit www.cnfa.ca or contact Jack Van der Laan 905 332 7000 or Hans Kloet 905 336 7184.
- May 9** Noon-hour Organ Recital featuring Eric Osborne (Minister of Music, Trinity Anglican Church, Cambridge) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**, 12:15 pm. (wvan@rogers.com)
- May 10** Institute for Christian Studies 40th anniversary dinner and silent auction. **Toronto**. For tickets see www.icscanada.edu/40thanniversary. See ad this issue.
- May 16** Noon-hour Organ Recital featuring Alison Clark (Music Director, St. Mark's Anglican Church, **Brantford**) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, Brantford, 12:15 pm. (wvan@rogers.com)
- May 23** Noon-hour Organ Recital featuring James Noakes (Music Director at St. Paul's Cathedral, London) at St. Jude's Anglican Church, Brantford, 12:15 pm. (wvan@rogers.com)
- May 24, 25** **Chatham** Christian Schools 50th anniversary celebration. Open house 1-4 and evening program. Sunday worship. More information to follow in the April 14 issue or visit www.chathamchristian.ca
- May 31, June 7, June 8** Calvary CRC, **Ottawa**, 50th anniversary events and worship. Details to follow in the April 14 issue or go to www.calvarycrc.ca
- June 6 & 7** The 50th anniversary of **Wellandport** Christian School Plan Reunion Celebration. See ad this issue

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MARANATHA CRC

Cambridge, Ontario
celebrated its 50th anniversary with a special service held on January 27 2008.

Celebrations and special events are planned for Saturday, **April 19** at 7 p.m. and on Sunday **April 20** during the 10 a.m. service. We would like to extend a special invitation to all former members as well as those who would like to celebrate with us.

"I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord
"plans to give you hope and a future"

Jeremiah 29 : 11



Marriage encounter weekend

**London, ON.
May 2-4**

For more information or to register on-line, go to www.reformedme.org or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org

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Parkview Meadows Retirement Village
72 Town Centre Drive, Townsend ON N0A 1S0
519-587-2448 ext.400

WELLANDPORT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
50th Anniversary 1958-2008

The 50th anniversary of Wellandport Christian School is a time to reflect with gratitude, God's faithfulness to the WCS community.

Plan to attend.

June 6 & 7, 2008 Reunion Celebration

Visit the school's website for details, updates, photo gallery, and more...



Staff 1958:

Debbie Bergman, Jenny Utterdyk, Mr. Van Dalen, Isaak DenDekker

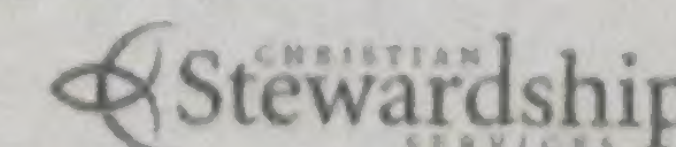
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News

'Fitna': Dutch leader's anti-Islam film brings strife



Geert Wilders has called Islam's holy book a "fascist" text

Robert Marquand

The Hague — It's a lurking provocation in Europe's sometimes rocky encounter with its burgeoning Muslim population: For months, a popular, flamboyant far-right Dutch party leader has been preparing an incendiary film about Islam rumored to contain lurid scenes of execution and a flaming Koran. With his flashy dyed platinum hair and his 24-hour security protection, Geert Wilders routinely compares the Koran to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, says almost all terrorists are Muslims, and advocates deporting Islamic clerics.

So it isn't surprising that the short film — which has yet to secure an outlet that will air it — is being compared to Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad that sparked global Muslim riots two years ago. Iran and Pakistan have condemned the video, titled "Fitna" — Arabic for strife. The Taliban has threatened retaliation against Dutch troops in Afghanistan.

"Fitna" has so far been the biggest show never seen, but the buildup has given Mr. Wilders growing publicity, and civic leaders time to respond.

Unlike Denmark, which held to a free speech position on the cartoons, the Dutch government has been telling Muslim nations and Islamic organizations that it doesn't agree with Wilders's views. The main question that

has emerged in the debate is whether it is acceptable for an elected official to use free speech to attack the identity of other groups, even if he or she feels they are causing harm to the Netherlands.

"I don't care if someone hates Islam," says Tafi Ali, a young Muslim from Morocco who works in a construction firm in Amsterdam. "But is it responsible for a leader to use words that can bring hate and negative consequences?"

Since January, Wilders has tried — and failed — to air "Fitna" on Dutch TV and then at The Hague's foreign press center. This week Wilders's backup, a US-based website, was shut down by the hosting service Network Solutions, pending an investigation of its acceptable use policy. Tuesday, the right-wing Czech National Party proposed broadcasting "Fitna," citing the "cowardice" of Dutch and EU politicians. Wilders said he might resort to handing out DVDs in central Amsterdam.

But despite the setbacks, the Sturm und Drang surrounding "Fitna" has been a colossal publicity boon for the controversial politician.

"He doesn't care [about negative consequences]; I think he loves this," says a Hague-based journalist who covers Wilders's party.

Much publicity — for him and Muslims

Dutch security alerts have gone from "limited" to "substantial" this month. In the Netherlands, the unseen video brings daily press coverage, as well as seminars,

TV debates, lectures by the mayor of Amsterdam, and a recent decrying of it as an "unnecessary provocation" by the eminent philosopher Jürgen

Habermas, in what he calls the modern condition of a "post-secular Europe."

Harry de Winter, a prominent Dutch citizen who is Jewish, took out a large ad in the daily *de Volkskrant* arguing that if Wilders were to say about Jews what he is saying about Muslims — in other words, if he advocated that temples be closed and rabbis deported — the entire country would rise in retaliation over such an anti-Semitic act.

The Islamic community announced in February it would open its doors to the public after the video airs, to show "we have nothing to hide." A joint ecumenical statement by Protestant and Muslim groups said last week that they "forcefully reject [Fitna] if the Koran and the Prophet Mohammed are treated with contempt."

Heleen Terwijn, who runs weekend schools in inner-city Amsterdam, says, "The good side of this whole thing is that many Muslims who were unknown will become known as normal people with a normal point of view. Too many Dutch see Muslims as scary relatives of Osama bin Laden."

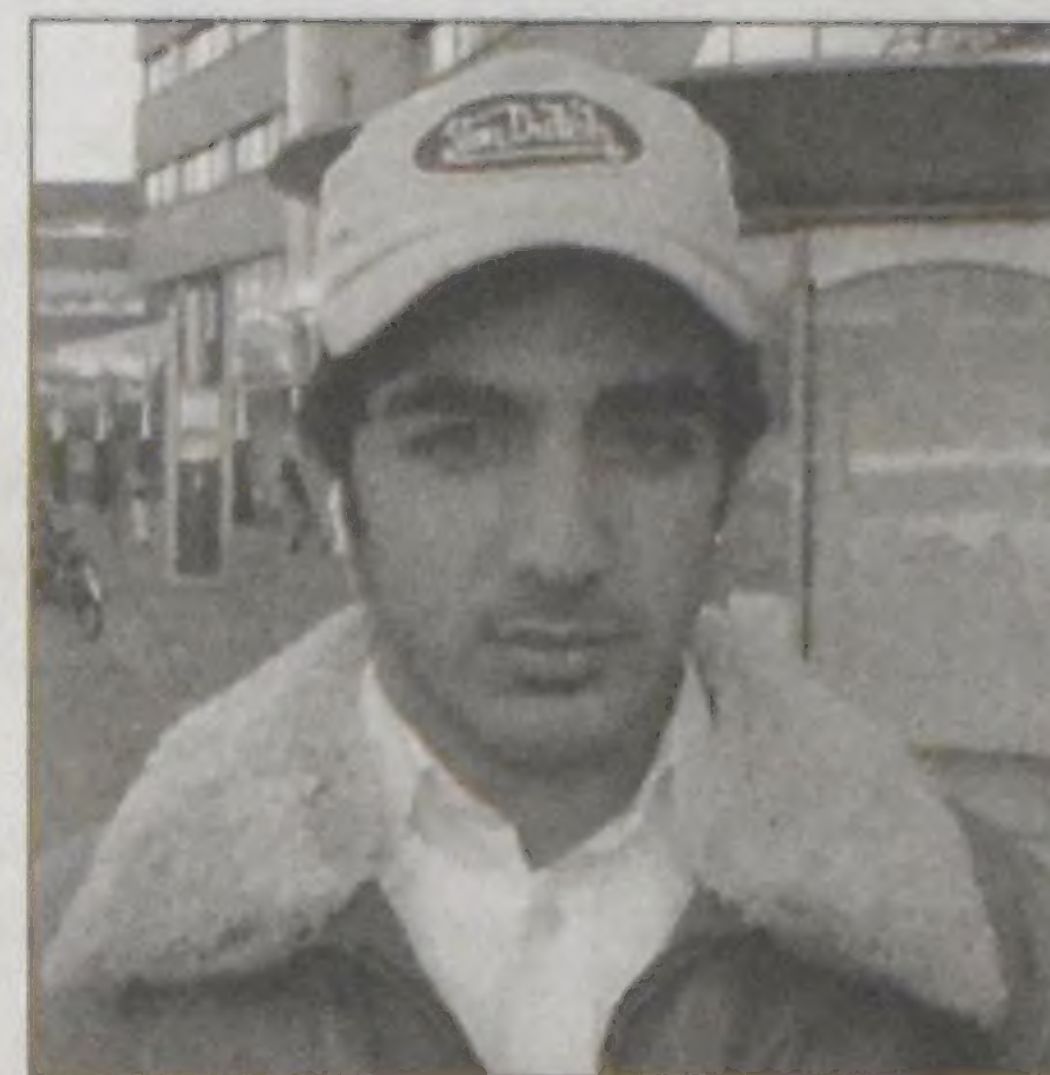
Still, some of the Dutch worry that the popular fears that Wilders represents are growing faster than Holland's ability to integrate its rising minorities. Mainstream talk about crime and indifference to Dutch traditions and decorum by Muslims is increasing.

While some Dutch writers like the assassinated politician Pim Fortuyn started attacking Islam as a backward idea in the 1990s, Wilders has conflated the message further and has focused on Muslims as people, experts say.

"Fortuyn was simply going after Islamic theology, but Wilders is going further," says Gerard van der Ree, a Dutch political scientist in Leiden. "He's equating Islam and Muslims and causing people to fear and hate them, on the grounds that they are fascist. It's an eliminationist model, ironically."

In recent months, Wilders has shifted his rhetoric to focus more on Islam than its adherents.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, one of few Wilders has given, he said, "I believe the Islamic theology is a retarded, dangerous one, but I make a distinction," Wilders said. "I don't hate people. I don't hate



Tanar Ozbek, 20, banking and insurance student
"There is security around the mosques everywhere and it's a real shame that things are going this way in the Netherlands. I was born here but I'm Turkish and a Muslim. I hear 'Muslims this' and 'Muslims that' and I fall under that - I don't feel so safe any more even when I'm in a mosque."



Radouan Veldmeijer, 21, cook
"I'm half Moroccan and the atmosphere now in the Netherlands is terrible."

"I was adopted and since I was seven months old I have been brought up by Dutch parents, so for me it's doubly difficult. I'm not a Muslim but since the murder (of Dutch filmmaker Van Gogh) I've been sworn at in the street by skinhead types."

Muslims.... I am not saying all Muslims are wrong or are terrorists or criminals. You will never hear me say that."

Wilders is often laughed off as a crank in the Netherlands, popularly referred to as Holland, even while most of the Dutch defend his right to speak.

"It's Holland and I'm proud to live in a country where you can say anything, even if I don't agree," says Jeremy, a café owner in The Hague.

Why Wilders's popularity is rising

Wilders, who has warned of a "tsunami of Islamization coming to Europe," has built his career on fears over an immigrant influx — including those of the nearly 1 million Muslims in this country of 16 million residents. His message has resonated with a growing percentage of Dutch voters who feel he is telling truths that elite politicians are too polite or tolerant to voice.

His popularity rose after the shocking 2004 street killing by a Dutch-Moroccan of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, who with a Dutch parliamentarian had produced a film criticizing Islam's oppression of women. Two years later, his Freedom Party surprised the elites by scoring nine out of 150 members of parliament in 2006 elections.

Some residents here described conflicted feelings about

politicians like Wilders that they detest, and a public discourse that seems not to capture the extent of social divisions in Holland.

"I hear Muslims making very hard statements about their situation," says Wouter Mertens, a shop manager and PhD candidate in Amsterdam. "The cultures in Holland are separating further; you can feel it. Our tolerance is being destroyed. We used to be able to have reasonable discussions about things like the burqa or scarf. People did and didn't like it, said so, and did it with some tolerance and certainly openly. Now, no."

One Rotterdam business consultant, Rhys Jansen, who spent years working for a Dutch oil firm in the Arab world, says Wilders has rightly grasped the uncertainty and worry over losing a good standard of living in a country that traditional Dutch people feel is different from the one they were born in — and he is playing on this fear.

Even many Muslims say they don't like the hidden tensions and new pressures in Holland brought by culture wars. Mehmet, who works in a Leiden falafel and kebab cafe, says he came from Egypt 20 years ago to escape religion. "No one here would bother you about anything," he says. "That's what I like about Holland, but I am worried this is changing."

